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MORNING SEED;

or,

Bible Words for Young Disciples.

By

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Lady Yester's Church, Edinburgh.*



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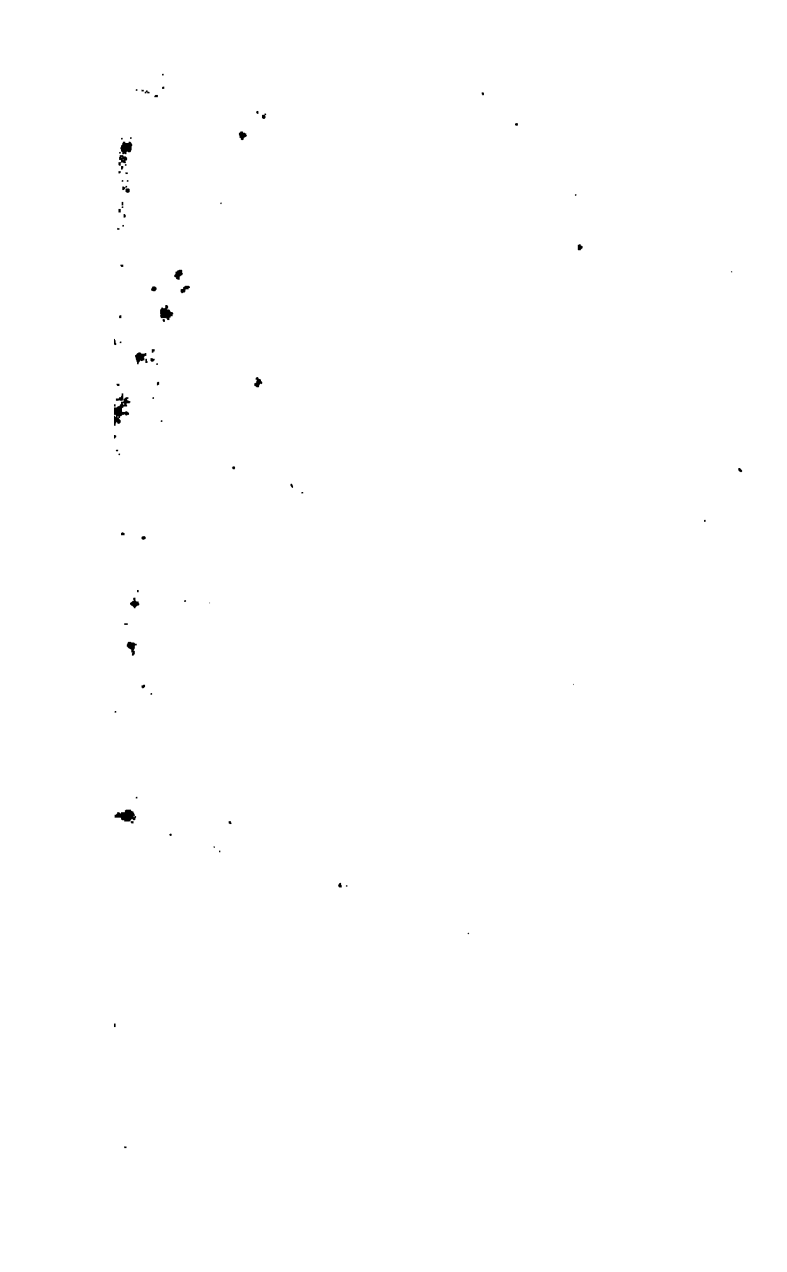
100. n. 108



Preface.

THERE are thousands of Sermons preached every week to grown-up persons; but very few, comparatively, are preached to the young. It is to be feared this is one reason why many who are very fond of the Sunday school dislike the church, and either never form regular habits of attendance, or leave off as soon as they leave the Sabbath class. Of late years, however, things have been improving in this respect. Clergymen, if they do not themselves preach, get some friend to preach from their pulpit, at stated times, sermons especially intended for the benefit of children and young persons connected with their parishes or congregations. I have been in the habit for many years of so addressing my Sabbath scholars, and it has been suggested to me that a volume containing some of the sermons so delivered might interest other Sunday scholars, and be





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MORNING SEED.

I.

The Divine Guide-Book.

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation."—2 TIM. III. 14, 15.

 HIS sermon is to be about the Sabbath scholar's Guide-book. You all know what a guide or guide-book is. Suppose any stranger were going to London or Edinburgh, and wished to know all about it, he would very likely buy a guide-book. It would tell him what sights he should go to see; it would direct him how to get to the different places. By means of it he could easily find his way through the city, and so get pleasure and profit from his visit. Or suppose I wanted to go through France, I would get a guide-book

to tell me what route to take, what places to go to, and how I could find my way home when my time of wandering was over.

Now, you are travelling through this world. You want to know what you should do, how you can best get through the journey of life, what is to become of you at death, and how you can secure a happy home in heaven. The Holy Bible, consisting of the Old Testament and the New, is the Divine guide-book which tells you all these things. It tells you who made this world and put you in it, what you are here for, what you should see and do, and what you should avoid,—how to travel here, and how you can get to a happy home in heaven when all your earthly wanderings are over. It is this guide-book that Paul refers to in the verses I have taken for my text. Timothy knew it, and Paul told him to continue to follow its direction, always to believe it and refer to it, and, if so, all would be well with him in life and death, in time and eternity.

It is about this guide-book from God for Sabbath scholars, as well as for others, that I am to speak to you at present. I hope, therefore, you will be very attentive, and try

to understand and to remember what I am about to say. And I hope and pray that this sermon may enable and incline you hereafter to "continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of" at the Sabbath school, "knowing of whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Now, with regard to this divine guide-book I am to tell you, *first*, what you should do with it; and, *secondly*, why you should do as I tell you.

I. Then what should you do with this divine guide-book, the Holy Bible? In the first place, you should learn its contents thoroughly—you *should seek to know what is in it*.

What although the traveller had a guide-book, if he did not know what it said? But you can read, and you have friends to teach you; you have therefore no excuse for being ignorant of the Bible. It will not do you any good to have a finely-bound Bible at

home, or to carry it in your pocket, or to hold it in your hand. The traveller must consult his guide-book, and so must you. Even children can do that—the good child Timothy did that. He had learned the Bible. “*Continue*,” Paul says, “in the things which thou hast learned.” When he was very young he knew what the Bible said: “From a child,” Paul says, “thou hast known the Holy Scriptures.”

You have many advantages which he had not. There was no printing in those days, and it was very difficult to get a single book of the Bible. Now you can have the whole Scriptures nicely printed, and that in so little bulk that you can carry them about with you wherever you go. All the books of the New Testament were not written when Timothy was a child; they were not all written when this letter was addressed to him. This Epistle is itself a portion of the sacred guide-book. Now you have the whole of it. Every word that God has spoken to sinful men for their guidance you may know, for you have the whole Word of God, which begins with the Book of Genesis and ends with the Revelations.

You, I trust, have fathers and mothers that know the Bible, and that teach you the truth as it is in Jesus; and you have Sabbath teachers and a minister to explain the things you do not know.

Timothy's father was a Greek, and the Greeks believed in heathen gods, and not in the true God; but some of them believed in the God of Israel, and became proselytes of the gate, and he may have been one of them. His mother, however, was a very good woman. She was a Jewess, and believed with an unfeigned faith; so did his grandmother; and it was from them he learned what the divine guide-book said. But they lived far away from Jerusalem, and there were no railways in those days to take people quickly from one place to another; so that although Timothy might be two or three years old when Jesus died, yet, living there in the highlands of Asia Minor, it does not seem that they ever heard anything of him—at least, anything they could rely upon—till twelve years after Jesus' death, when Paul and Barnabas went to Derbe and Lystra, and preached the gospel of Christ.

You remember, perhaps, how the inhabi-

tants of Lystra treated the apostles. At first they wanted to worship them as gods, calling Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul Mercury, because they had seen them, in Jesus' name, healing a cripple who never had walked. But very soon the Jews stirred up the people, and they stoned Paul, and drew him out of the city, and left him there for dead. It is supposed, from some words of Paul in his letters to Timothy, that the boy was there at the time, and saw this shameful treatment of the apostle. He may have been one of the disciples that stood round about him when he rose up after having been hurt and stunned with the stoning. At all events, there is reason to believe that this visit of Paul was made the means of leading him to Jesus as the Son of God, and teaching him more than ever he had known before of the Holy Scriptures and the Prince-Messiah.

It was only, therefore, the Old Testament Scriptures that Timothy could know as a child. He knew more than Joseph, or Samuel, or David ; he could read the Bible from Genesis to Malachi. He knew that the Saviour was promised, and must soon appear ; but perhaps

he did not know till he was fourteen or fifteen years of age that Jesus had already appeared, and was crucified, and had risen, and was now sending his apostles everywhere to preach the gospel to every creature. But what his mother could teach him, she did ; and what he could learn, he knew.

I think I see little Timothy sitting beside his mother or his grandmother, listening to their words. They would tell him about Adam and Eve, and the beautiful garden they were placed in ; about the serpent and the forbidden fruit ; about their disobedience to God, and their banishment from Eden ; about Joseph and his bad brothers, and his coat of many colours. They would tell him about David, and his battle with the giant ; and about Daniel, and the lions that were very hungry, but would not eat him, because God prevented them ; and I daresay very often they told him that One was yet to come, better than Moses and greater than David, who was to be the great Deliverer of his people, and the Prince of Peace.

At first, I daresay, Timothy would like to hear all these nice stories, and would not care

so much for anything else. He wondered what the serpent was like, and how it could speak ; how Joseph's brothers could use him so ill ; how David was not afraid to meet Goliath with only a pebble and a sling ; and how the lions could be kept from eating Daniel, if they were very hungry and he could not get away. But by-and-by he began to like to hear about God, so great and yet so good, caring for all his children, and wishing them to be holy and happy like himself. He began to feel that he was not so good as he should be, and to pray that God would pardon his sins and make him a good boy ; and that he would send that great Deliverer who was to come ; that he might be a follower of his, believing him, and loving him, and obeying him, and at last dwelling for ever in heaven as his home. He sought, you may be sure, to make the divine guide-book in everything his director, and to run in the way of God's commandments.

So Timothy grew up from childhood to boyhood, and then Paul came, and he learned from him that Jesus was the Christ ; that he had proved himself to be the Son of God by won-

derful works of power, and wonderful words of wisdom, and a wonderful life of holy love ; that he had been sacrificed, as the Lamb of God, for sin, and risen again from the dead, and gone to heaven to prepare a home for all who should believe and obey him. Then he loved the Lord Jesus. He could not help it, for Jesus had so loved him. It was that *he* might be pardoned, that His blood was shed ; it was that *he* might know all the truth, that He came as the divine teacher to the earth ; it was that *he* might be good, and holy, and happy, that He offered, even to him, His own Holy Spirit, and suffered even little children to come to Him, that they might be subjects in the kingdom of heaven. And so, as he grew up to be a man, he always lived as in the sight of God. He felt that Jesus Christ was looking down from heaven upon him, and he wished to labour in the service of his heavenly Master here, that when he died he might enter into the rest which the sacred guide-book told him of, and which remains for all the children of God.

Now, my dear children, read your guide-book thus ; learn to know it perfectly, consult

it every day ; remember that to whom much is given, of them the more shall be required.

Some children have never learned to read—have never been at any Sabbath-school—have no good mothers to teach them to pray, or to tell them what this guide-book says. Some are deaf, and cannot hear their teacher's voice, and yet they strive to learn. Some are blind, and cannot see to read like you, and yet they strive to learn. I have heard of one man who was becoming blind. He was told he could not see beyond a month or two. What did he do ? He began to learn the Psalms of David, that he might know them all before his sight was altogether taken from him, so that even then he might be able to know the contents of that blessed portion of the guide-book God has given to comfort and support, to cheer and to enlighten us as we are travelling through the Vale of Life and the Valley of Death to the fields of Paradise.

This, then, is the first thing you are to do with the divine guide-book. You are to learn its contents thoroughly, and know what is in it.

But, secondly, you are to continue to *trust*

your guide-book all your life, and follow always and everywhere the directions it gives you.

It is sad to see any man or woman living a bad life ; but it is especially sad to see boys and girls who have been well brought up turning out ill. We sometimes say of such persons, they knew better, and the greater, therefore, is their guilt. If a person tires of looking at his guide-book, he must expect to go wrong. If he prefers his own way to its directions, and deliberately chooses the wrong way, he is going wrong with his eyes open. Those who know what the Bible says, and yet take their own way, are very guilty. Those who think the Bible is a guide for Sabbath scholars only, and never look at it after they leave the school, must blame themselves if they find that at death they are driven to a prison, and not received into a palace. And yet, how many are there who do not feel the need of continuing in the things which they have learned at Sabbath schools ! They learn Psalms, and Paraphrases, and Catechisms, and Proofs, and Bible lessons *now* ; but that is only for a year or two, they

think, and soon all that will be over. I asked a boy, not long ago, if he read the Bible ; and he said, " No, I am out of the Bible now." He thought after he was out of the Bible class, it was to be thrown away like an old bonnet, and paid no more attention to. It is meant to be a book of life, *for the whole of life*—for youth and manhood—for girls and women—for strong boys and dying old men. It is a guide through all the stages of earthly life. With it to direct us, even though " we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we need fear no evil." It will be a light to our feet and a lamp to our path till the day break, and the shadows flee away, and the Bible be needed no more, because Christ himself, the living Word, will then and for ever be our *divine Guide*.

Paul did not in this respect preach one thing and practise another. He had suffered many things because of Christianity, but he continued to the last believing and doing those things which Christ had taught. Indeed, there is something very affecting in these words of Paul to Timothy. He had not in his boyhood any one to lead him to Christ.

When he grew up, he was the determined enemy of Christ and Christians. He wanted them *not* to continue in the things they had learned. He dragged them to prison, both men and women. When Stephen was put to death, he was a young man, and the false witnesses laid down their clothes at his feet before they stoned him to death. When Paul saw any of the Christians he had been the means of putting into prison, he must have felt greatly ashamed. If there were any whom he forced by his persecutions away from the cross, and persuaded to deny Christ, oh, how miserable this must have made him all his life ! And when he thought of all his evil deeds, he must have grieved over his past sins. Therefore he wished Timothy and everybody to begin early to believe Christ, and do his will, and to continue *steadfast* in the faith, whatsoever persecution they might suffer, and whatever trials or temptations might be their lot.

Paul had known, since he became a Christian, what it was to be tried and tempted ; but he held fast by Christ and by his cross. This, indeed, was probably the last letter Paul

wrote. He wrote it in the prison in Rome. Many sufferings he had borne since his conversion. He was lashed, put in prison, struck with rods, nearly killed. He was left for whole days without food. His own friends turned against him; and Christ's friends treated him coldly for a while, because of his former manner of life. But all these by-past sufferings had never once made him regret that he had become a Christian—had never made him wish to leave Christ. And now he is an old man and a prisoner, expecting daily to be sentenced to death by the Emperor of Rome.

Nero was then upon the throne, and he was a very monster of cruelty. He steeped sheets of canvas in oil; he put these sheets round the Christians; he then besmeared the whole with pitch or tar, and having chained the victims to iron poles in his halls and gardens, set them on fire, and made them torches for his friends to see by as they came through his garden grounds and palace porches to his feasts and revelries. But even that was not enough to make Paul give up the Christian's guide-book in disgust. Whither

was it guiding him? To *martyrdom*. He was within a step (and that step soon was taken) of a cruel death. Yet he did not throw away his guide-book. He did not doubt that it would take him safely home to heaven at last, though the pathway leading to his rest might be very rugged and thorny. Hear what he says in this very letter: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

The Bible had been a good guide-book to him. He wrote to Ephesus to tell Timothy it would be a good guide-book all his life to him; and Timothy believed him and acted accordingly. Paul still says to us, "The Bible is a good guide-book for you. Continue you in the things which ye have learned and been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures,

which are able to make you wise unto salvation."

But not only must you learn what this guide-book says, and all your life long continue to read it, and trust it, and obey it,—you must also, in the third place, *give others* this guide-book to heaven. There are heathen nations that are wandering about in darkness, with no one to lead them *home*. And there are heathens at home, who will not be guided for their good; and there are Romanists, who are not allowed or encouraged to apply to the Bible for direction; and there are children that have not this guide-book, and cannot read it though they had. O Sabbath scholars! give, and pray, and work, as far as possible, that all at home and abroad may know as you do that God is your Father, Christ your Saviour, the Holy Spirit your Sanctifier, Heaven the home of God's children, and the Bible the only divine guide-book to conduct them thither.

Timothy, after he knew about Christ, went with Paul the next time he came to his home; and when he was a very young man began to preach the gospel to others; and he was a zealous labourer for God. So should you be.

It is not only ministers that must try to make people good. Every one must try. It will not do you any harm to let others see by your torch and light theirs at it. To give others who are starving the bread of life and the water of salvation will not make you poorer. It does not do the traveller any harm to tell his neighbours which train to go by, and it may be of the greatest importance for them to know. It will do *you* good to lead others to Christ; and oh, what good to them! It will not keep you or them from dying, but it will lead you safely to your Father's house, and give you everlasting joy.

You are young, but your efforts may be made the means of saving the poor boy hesitating on the verge of dishonesty, and the poor girl hovering round the flame of pleasure, and the young man staggering down the slopes of intemperance, and worldlings dead in sin. To show how even a little boy may do good in this way, I shall tell you a story. Some children went to live for a few days with their uncle. He was a worldly man of respectable character, but the divine guide-book was never consulted, and family prayers

were never offered up. One evening he was giving them a lesson, and one of the children said to him, "Papa reads a lesson every night. **You should read a lesson like papa.**" He had not the least idea what the bright-eyed boy meant, and said at once, "Oh, tell me papa's lesson, and I shall say my lesson too!" The little boy looked round—saw on a side-table a large Bible, more for ornament than use—with difficulty he lifted it up and carried it to his uncle, and said, "Papa reads that lesson every night, and you must say yours out of it too." Oh, let us hope that this sermon, preached to him by a little boy, was not in vain! God can make children his servants for good, and "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings he perfecteth praise."

II. And now, secondly and shortly, Why should you get, and study, and circulate this divine guide-book?

1. Because it is *trustworthy*. The first and chief thing we want to know about a guide-book is whether it can be trusted. But how are we to know this? We can examine it, and see whether it seems to be true;

whether one part of it is consistent with another; and whether it agrees with what we otherwise believe to be true. Now, if you read the Bible I am sure you will allow that it *looks true*. It tells us to do what we otherwise believe to be right, and it mentions things which we know from other sources to be true. This at once gives us some reason to think our guide-book trustworthy. Then, again, it is something to know that it has guided many good friends,—many thousands of men, and among them some of the wisest and best that have ever lived. They have trusted it, and they have often said that they were not disappointed. They never regretted that they followed its directions. But the great proof that this guide-book is trustworthy is this,—it is the *word of God*. He will not, and cannot deceive us. And if he writes a book telling us what to believe, and what to do, where we are going to, and how we are to go, we are safe, and only safe in following his directions.

Now it is true that the Bible and Testament, as we sometimes call the Holy Scriptures, were written by a number of different persons,—

Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and Paul, and others. But these holy men all wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you ask me how we know this. I shall tell you one way. The Old Testament was in the hands of the Jews when Jesus came into the world ; and, ever since that time, the Jews, though they did not believe in Christ, have kept these Old Testament writings. Now, if Christians had ever changed them, the Jews would have known and exposed them. We may be sure, then, that the Old Testament which we have is the same which Jesus saw and read in the synagogues or churches of the Jews. Well, in that book, which all the people knew of before Jesus was born, wonderful things were told. For instance, the great Prince whom they expected was spoken of. It mentioned what tribe he was to be of; what town he would be born in; what his character and circumstances were to be; how he was to suffer, and yet that he would live for ever as a king. It seemed very strange. Yet, if you will compare these prophecies with the gospels you will see that all they said was fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, who could show such *wisdom* but

God alone ? We may guess some things, but these particulars nobody could guess, and especially hundreds of years beforehand. Surely then we may well believe the Old Testament to be trustworthy and true, when writings such as these appear in it, which could have only been written by revelation from God.

Or to take another proof. Read the New Testament. See how Christ and his apostles healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead. This *power* could only have come from God. What they say must be true, for God would not have given liars power like that. And what do they say ? Jesus Christ, speaking of the Old Testament, prays thus to his Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth : thy word is truth ;" and again he says, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." He promised his followers the Holy Ghost to lead them unto all the truth. He said to them, "He that heareth you heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth him that sent me." These followers wrote the Gospels, and Epistles, and Revelation, and all the New Testament. Many of the New Tes-

tament scriptures were written before Paul wrote this letter, and I daresay he speaks of them as well as of the Old Testament scriptures when he says, in the verse immediately after my text, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

You cannot doubt, then, that this guide-book is trustworthy, for it is divine. It is true; for it is *the very word of God*. Friends may deceive you, or be themselves deceived; God cannot. What Christ reveals you may believe; where he directs you, you may go to, and fear no evil. Continue, therefore, in the things it tells you. There is no other guide-book worthy of your confidence. The Moham-medan may believe in his Koran, and the latter-day saint in his Golden Bible, and infidels in nothing. We believe in God, and in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the only rule to direct us how we may glorify God on earth and enjoy him for ever in heaven.

2. But not only is this guide-book *true*; it is also *plain*.

Some guides are very puzzling. I have seen travellers poring over theirs at railway stations and in trains, and they could make little or nothing of them. But though there are many mysteries in the Bible, the path of our duty is marked out so clearly that he who runs may read, and he who reads may run. Even a *child* can find its way to the city of refuge below, and the holy city above. The scriptures plainly teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what the duty is which God requires of man.

3. This guide-book is not only true and plain ; it is *always useful*.

Some guides will do for one place, and not for another. This does for all ages, for all circumstances, for life, for death, for the knowledge of God and of ourselves, of our duty and destiny. It tells us of pardon at the cross, of help at the throne of grace, of immortality to the soul, resurrection to the body, and eternal life to both. Many things may do for one thing which will not do for another. A horse does for a land journey, but is of no use when it reaches the sea. . Worldly prudence may guide us to wealth here, but is useless on the

brink of the dark river, on the shore of the eternal sea.

But whether we are in prosperity or adversity, bereaved or happy, young or old, ignorant or learned, working or worshipping, well or ill, living or dying, the Bible is everywhere and always profitable. Paul tells us especially one great use of it, "It will make us wise unto salvation." It is a great thing to be clever, but clever men are often bad men. There is a better wisdom than theirs, a wisdom that shall save us from eternal ruin. It is a great thing to be learned and admired for our abilities on earth. But learning will not light up the darkness of the valley of death or show us the way home to heaven. This book makes the simple wise ; he knows God as his Father ; he is wise to choose good and avoid evil, for he follows *it* ; he is wise unto salvation, being saved on earth from doing or from going wrong, and in eternity from sin and misery in hell.

I have seen a Sabbath scholar leaving her mother and grandmother, who used to teach her as Timothy was taught, and as she was dying she said to them, "Do not weep. I

am going to a happy home, and our Father will be with you when I am away, and bring you also home." It was this divine book that enabled her to say so ; it made her wise unto salvation, and guided her to glory. Oh ! is it not a useful guide-book ?

4. But, lastly, this guide-book is not only true, and plain, and useful ; it is also *very good*.

Paul calls it "the Holy Scriptures." Some books are very bad, and teach evil ; some are very foolish, and do us no good. This is the *best book in the world*. While others read novels and poetry all day long, love you to read the Bible. While you *sometimes* read about plants, and animals, and travels, and history, and lives of good men, and the wonders of heaven, *every day* read your Bible. It will make you good and holy if you believe it and obey it. Only bear in mind it is not enough to *know* about Christ ; you must *trust* in him. It will make you wise unto salvation, not by your knowledge of it, but "through faith, which is in Christ Jesus." *It gives you salvation through faith*. It is not the clever Sabbath scholar ; it is the true believing, pray-

ing boy or girl who is made holy and taken at death to heaven.

Pious friends, and parents, and teachers, and ministers have followed that guide-book. It has made them happy, and they wish the same happiness for you. You may leave them—they may die. It does not need, amid these changes, that your guide-book should be changed. Continue still and always in the things which ye have learned. All flesh is grass, and perisheth ; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And after you grow up and they are dead, as you look at your Bible, remember *them*, and read it. As you hear children saying their prayers, remember your own childhood, and continue them, or begin them again if you have left them off. As you think of departed friends, and stand upon their graves, let them, though dead, be speaking to you still, and telling you to be followers of them, as they were followers of Christ. Do not dishonour their graves by forgetting their counsels.

To conclude, let this book be your guide-book *even unto death*. I do not know what is before you. You may live long. If so,

live to God. You may very soon fall through the broken bridge-way to the waters of death flowing deep and dark beneath. Therefore, now prepare to meet your God. You may, by applying yourselves to reading, writing, arithmetic, and other branches of learning, get on in the world. It is all well ; but seek to be wise unto salvation. You may have many trials : seek here the consolations of grace. Many things in after years you may forget ; but, O dear children, though you live to be a hundred years of age, continue, I beseech you, in the things of God which you have learned at home, in the church, and in the Sabbath school, knowing of whom you have learned them, and that the more will be required from you, because, while others have been terribly neglected in their childhood, ye have “known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Amen.

II.

The Children's Friend.

"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."—MARK X. 14.



IT was Jesus Christ who spoke these words. The reason of his speaking them was this :—One day, as he was teaching the people, some of them who had young children, even infants, pushed through the crowd to get to him. They wanted him to touch their little ones, and to give them his blessing.

There might be a good deal of ignorance connected with this wish. Some of them, perhaps, expected that, after his touch and blessing, their infants would be freed from all the diseases of childhood, and would be certain to escape from early death ; and some of them, it may be, lived to feel disappointment when their children suffered and died in early life, as many others did. But some of them had

a higher and better faith than this ; and even those of them that did not know that Jesus was the "Prince-Messiah," believed he was a good man, beloved of God, and had some vague idea that he could do their children spiritual good, and that it was a good thing for them to be brought to Jesus.

In their conduct there was less selfishness than in that of the multitudes who brought their lame and blind and diseased friends to Christ. These thought only of having their bodies made strong, that they might be able to work and enjoy life, and not be a burden any longer to themselves and them ; but those parents believed that Jesus could do good even to those who had no bodily ailments, and that even their children required and might receive his blessing and his help. As these parents were pressing with their little ones through the crowd, the disciples pushed them back. They saw that there were even *infants*, as Luke says, among them, and that none of them needed to be healed. What was the use, they thought, of bringing such little children to Jesus ? *They* could not join in his prayers or understand his words, so they rebuked those

that brought them, and wanted to keep them back. But what did Christ do? Did he say, "Take these infants away. Just now I do not care for them, and cannot do them any good. Bring them back when they are older; *then* they may get *some* benefit from coming unto me, but *none just now?*" No. He encouraged the fathers and mothers to come near. It is very seldom we read of Christ being angry, but on this occasion he was *much displeased* with his disciples. He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: and he took them up in his arms and blessed them."

See, then, how kindly Jesus treats the young—how he welcomes them—how much he loves them. May he not well be called *the Children's Friend*? I need not tell you how great and wise Jesus was. He could teach as no other could. He could do works no other could. If he was poor, it was because he did not wish to be rich. He knew where all the silver and gold in the world could be found; but you see he did not think money was the one thing needful for happiness—he did not think there was no way of

doing good but by giving money. Once when he was asked to pay a tax amounting to half-a-crown, and had no money to pay it, he sent Peter to catch a fish, and told him that if he opened it he would find the half-crown there. He could have got loads of gold as easily as he got that piece of silver, and if he remained poor, it was not from necessity, but from choice.

Well, it was this man, so wise and great, that was so humble and kind, not only to poor men, but to poor children too. Not only was he different from many great men, who liked to have only the rich and noble round them,—he loved every day to teach and help and heal the wretched and the poor. Still more than that, you see, he cared for boys and girls like you. When a great man speaks to a poor person, *that* is thought very condescending; but to care for his children, to take them in his arms, to smile on them, to give them a welcome and an embrace—*this*, where there is no selfish object in view, is a rare act of love. We love great men more when we see them thus mindful of the young. I remember reading of the French general who landed at the Crimea when the English and French

went to fight against the Russians. He lifted up the first pebble he trod upon, and plucked the first flower he saw, and he sent them home to his daughter. Was it not a touching act? Does it not make us think more of the hero when we see him thus also the loving father? Ay; but there is this difference,—*it was to his own child he sent the pebble and the flower.* Parents love their own children, and do not think them a burden; but sometimes they do not care to have other children near them, for they are not their own. But *Jesus looked upon all children as his*, and while he loved all men and women everywhere, he especially loved and welcomed the young.

But perhaps you ask, What have *we* to do with this? Jesus is dead long ago, and he cannot take us now in his arms. I answer, He who was crucified on Calvary is still alive, and Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever in his love. He is still able and willing to bless even the least of you. He is still saying, as he said eighteen hundred years ago, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." Why was it that Jesus loved

children so much, and that he is still the Children's Friend? He gives as his reason, that God's kingdom especially consists of persons like them,—“Of such,” he says, “is the kingdom of God.” What do you think Jesus meant by using such words? Clearly they are meant to tell us why it is that those children, or any children, should not be driven away from him. Perhaps each of the four following thoughts was in his mind as he said, Of such as these little children is the kingdom of God.

I. Little children are *likeliest* the subjects of God's kingdom.

II. They are *likeliest* to become subjects of his kingdom.

III. They have privileges in God's *kingdom on earth*.

IV. They have a place in his *kingdom in heaven*.

I. Little children are *likeliest the subjects* of God's kingdom. This is evidently the chief thing in the mind of Jesus when he used this language, for in the next verse he says, “Who-soever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.”

To enter God's kingdom we must become like children in innocence, in faith, in obedience, in love. As man's children are obedient to earthly parents, ready to receive instruction from them, full of confidence in them, ever ready to look to them, to cry to them when anything is wished for or is wrong, so must God's children be in regard to their heavenly Father. His kingdom consists of persons having and showing the same childlike dispositions and feelings towards him, that little children show to earthly friends—obedient, docile, trustful, always ready to cry, "Abba Father," and to ask of God the things they need, happy with him, and miserable when he is angry. Christ's followers are indeed *children* when they become subjects of the kingdom of God. The child is therefore the most fitting image of the Christian. And because Christ loves his people, therefore he loves all that are like them. The nearest approach in the kingdom of nature to the renewed spirit in the kingdom of grace, is the little child. Therefore Jesus says, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God."

As the body in the hour of death has a gentle, lovely, placid look, very different from its appearance weeks and months thereafter, so the spirit of childhood newly introduced to a world of spiritual death is very different from the soul utterly dead in trespasses and sins, and far gone in its loathsome corruption. The sun has set indeed, but there are lingering glories still hovering round the infant cradle ; some straggling beams of the faded light of heaven have yet been left in the darkened tabernacle ; there is still the shadow seen of the departed glory. Therefore while Christ says to the fathers and mothers of Israel, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye will do," he says to their infants, as he takes them in his arms and blesses them, "Of such is the kingdom of God."

Only we must not carry this too far. Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child. We are born in sin, and the seeds of spiritual as well as of bodily corruption are sown in human nature when we come into the world. Nobody can say that any children are so pure that they deserve to be admitted into heaven when they die. Everybody must

admit that as children, rosy as their cheeks are, and healthy though their looks are, are sure to die, so the most innocent little children, as they grow in years, are sure to sin. There is corruption in their soul as well as in their body. Are there not even little children who are very wicked? Young in years, they are matured in vice. Are there not little children even in our prisons, old in acts and habits of iniquity? and if these little children die the slaves of sin—the enemies of God—they will not be admitted as subjects of the kingdom of God; they will be imprisoned in Satan's kingdom of darkness, banished with destruction from the presence of God.

You may see how even children may commit sin, and bring upon themselves not a blessing, but a curse, if you turn to the second chapter of 2d Kings, at the 23d verse. You read there of little children mocking Elisha. They cried to him, "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head." Elijah had been carried up to heaven. These wicked children bade him also, like his master, get away up to heaven. He cursed them in the name of the Lord, and forty-two of them were torn by bears. Take


care, then, how you speak rudely to God's people, and insult old age. In every way seek to be good, and then you will not only be *like* God's people, which all little ones so far are, but you will be in deed and in truth the children of God, and subjects of the kingdom of heaven.

II. But, second, Jesus loves the young, and welcomes them, because children are *likeliest* to be the subjects of his kingdom. Death and sleep are sometimes very like each other—so are child-like innocence and Christ-like goodness. But as it is only Christ's power that can waken the dead to life, so there can be no Christian life given to childhood but by the grace of God. But here is a great encouragement for children. The young are not only likest God's people, they are *likeliest* to be his.

A new life is most easily begun in childhood, and Christianity is a new life. *A holy faith* is most easily embraced in childhood—the vicious and worldly cannot afford to believe it—and Christianity is a most holy faith. To come to Christ we must be humble, and wish in an honest heart to follow him. Humility and simplicity are features of child-

hood. Thus you see in every way it is the young that are likeliest to go to Christ, and so he loved them with exceeding love. The priests and Pharisees were hardened in their traditions and observances, and would not change them. But many of the children of Judah would come to Christ, to be the subjects of his kingdom. The Scribes and elders might be sore displeased with the hosannahs that were raised as Jesus was entering Jerusalem in triumph, but the children would then be found joining in these hosannahs. Then God out of the mouths of babes and sucklings perfected praise."

No doubt some could not and cannot come to Christ in childhood. Many were grown up when Christ said to them, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" and among heathen nations still, there are children that are not likely to be God's children, because they have never heard of God's Son. But *you have no such excuse*. Christ expects you to be his, and if you do not come now, you are not likely to come at all. When a person goes to a strange town, and there are any striking places in or



near it to be visited, very likely he will go as soon as he can find an opportunity and visit them. If he does not do this at once, ten to one he will never do it. So if you do not begin to love Christ when you are little children, and first hear of him, it is not likely you will love him when you are grown-up men and women.

Let me advise you then very earnestly not to put off, saying it is time enough to become good and follow Christ. *Come at once for fear of death,—*

"To-day, you frolic in the rosy bloom
Of jocund youth,—to-morrow knells you to the tomb."

You may have heard of a well-meaning but sadly-mistaken man, who refused to tell his son of Christ's religion for several years, in order that when he did tell him of it he might easily understand his meaning. Death might have come before that convenient season arrived. An accident may in a moment take your strength away; you may be going along the street quite well, and a carriage may ride over you, and its wheels may break your limbs, and make you a cripple all your days, or put an end to your life at once.

One day I announced to my Sunday scholars, that I would preach a sermon to them *next Sabbath*. There was a scholar in one of the younger classes, who heard me, and who said aloud, *he would be sure to go*. He was eight years old, quite strong, and if any might be sure, *he* seemed to be the one. But that young boy was dead and buried before that sermon was preached. That night when he went home, his mother said to him, "You should not have said you would be sure to go; for you do not know what a day or an hour may bring forth." "No fear, mother, we will both be there." Next night, his night-dress caught fire; he was carried to the Infirmary, suffered terrible agony, and his friends were glad to see him at rest. One of the few things that used to make him forget his torture, was the singing of the hymns he had learned in the Sabbath school, and a few hours before he died, he was singing the hymn beginning,—

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild."

It would have been well for him not to have been so sure. It was good for him that

he had learned of that gentle Jesus who did not refuse to put his hands even upon children's heads, and who, we may hope, in answer to the prayer of his hymn, whispered to the dying one as he was entering the dark valley—"Little child, come unto me, unto the kingdom of heaven."

Again, come to Christ at once *for fear of sin*.

Believe me it is far easier to begin the Christian life now than after you grow up. You cannot live away from Christ without doing many acts of evil, and every such act is an invisible cord binding you to the earth, and keeping you from him. It is very difficult for the man who has been accustomed to indulge the lusts of the flesh and of the world, even *to hear* the voice of Jesus bidding him away from them to him, and much more difficult to *break through* that array of enemies to Christ with which he has surrounded himself, and reach the Saviour's side. I know the child needs the Holy Spirit as well as the man, and that many a brand has been plucked from the burning, and that many, thanks be to God, *have broken through* the ranks of these enemies to God, escaping for their life, and

with their life, and clinging safely and thankfully thereafter to the cross of Christ.

But there are laws in the kingdom of grace as well as in that of nature. It is not all the same when you begin to think about religion. Come to Jesus now. Early seeking makes sure finding. Children are likeliest to become subjects of the kingdom of God.

I have now given you two reasons why Jesus especially loved and welcomed the young. I am now to give you a third reason, namely,—

III. Little children *have privileges in the Church of Christ on earth*; therefore, he who founded that Church, may well say, Suffer them to come to me.

Let me explain to you that those who brought these little ones were Jews. Even little children had an admitted connection with the Jewish Church. To every male infant circumcision, the seal of the covenant, was administered. At twelve or thirteen years old higher privileges awaited them, and they became children of the Law. Now it was very natural for these parents to wonder whether this man Jesus Christ, whom many

believed to be greater than Moses, and who came to found a new religion in the world, whether he would have anything to do with children, and any place or privilege in his Church for them. It seems to me that this act and this language of Jesus were so far an answer to these questionings of the Jews. He says, "Do not be afraid, if you become my followers, that your children will be shut out from my blessing. Even your children shall be as aforetime. The promise of the gospel blessing is not to you only but to *your children*, besides being to others afar off, even to as many as the Lord will call. My Church will not drive your children away." Hence in every age Christ's followers have fed his lambs; and hence the great majority of his professing followers have brought their little ones in the arms of faith and love for his blessing, and to connect them, as infant members, with his Church.

You have seen, I daresay, your minister coming down on Sabbath from the pulpit to the baptismal font, and sprinkling water on the countenances of little children. What is the meaning of that? I will tell you. Christ

told his disciples to baptize every one that wished to be a Christian, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. It was a proof that they were willing to come to Christ and to follow him. Now when parents have come to Christ themselves, they wish their children also to come to him. They believe that the water of baptism is a symbol of that *water of life, that word of truth*, which, applied by the Spirit of truth, cleanses the soul from pollution, just as water cleanses the body from filth. They believe that God baptizes with the Spirit in infancy, and, therefore, that the sign may be given to children, *and that infants are to be baptized*. So they bring their little ones to Jesus to be blessed, just as these Jewish parents did. They know these children cannot understand what is done, but neither could the infants who were brought to Jesus. Yet they believe that now as then it is good thus to be brought to Christ; that Jesus does not rebuke them for bringing them; nay, that he looks upon it in some sense *as a coming of these little ones* themselves to Christ, and says to those who would withhold from them their Christian name and this Christian

sacrament, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God."

If you ask me to tell you precisely what good baptism does to children or their parents, I might ask in answer, What good followed this blessing of infants by Christ? They might not all grow up to be good men and women. Jesus prayed for Judas, yet Judas was lost. Jesus may have taken some children in his arms and blessed them, to whom on the judgment-day he will say, "Depart from me, ye cursed." And why? Because as they grew up they went away from Jesus. So, though by baptism children are devoted to God and receive Christ's blessing; though they are freely offered, if they will follow him, all gospel blessings; though they are, as it were, publicly and solemnly lifted from beneath the curse of the first covenant, and *placed under the blessings of the second*; though they receive a Christian name, and are admitted to the Christian household, and have a right to receive very early from the Church teaching, and prayer, and sympathy, and love; yet all this may not bring them safely to

heaven. Baptism is not regeneration. The sprinkling of a few drops of water on the face will not of itself wash or cleanse the soul. You must not trust to your privileges. You got a Christian name then, but where is your Christian character? Are you walking worthy of the Christian name you bear? You were christened then; you may not be Christians after all. You were baptized with water then, have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit as with fire? You were then admitted into connection with the visible Church. You need to be members of the Church invisible and true, if you would for ever be with those children, who are subjects of the kingdom of God.

This, then, is another and a third reason why Jesus so loves and welcomes the youngest. Though not yet consciously the subjects of his kingdom, *they have a place and privileges in it.* They are the children of Christ's subjects. They are promised and dedicated by their parents to God, and whoever else may come into his kingdom from without, those that grow up within it *are expected* to believe and obey the Lord. They are born in the Christian camp, and whoever else may enlist and

fight the battles of the Lord, they are expected, as they grow, to take unto themselves the whole armour of God, and to fight the fight of faith as soldiers of the cross.

IV. But now, to conclude, there is this fourth reason, why Jesus loves and welcomes *even infants on the earth,—they have a place in the kingdom of God in heaven.*

We know that *we* shall be judged according to our works. But there are some that die before they have done any works, good or evil.

What then is to become of those who are taken away before their season of personal responsibility begins? Some say they will cease to live altogether. But surely our nature may develop itself into a spiritual and active life, though it is removed from this world. Although the seed has not been long enough on this field of time to burst and bring forth fruit, there are other fields better and sunnier than this, in which this change and development can still take place.

If, again, it be asked what the nature of their future life may be, most persons are agreed that though it cannot be in all respects the

same as Christians are to lead in heaven, they yet have been elected by a God of love to an eternal life of happiness with Him. And surely, it is not difficult to believe, that He who pardons here our actual transgressions, and gives grace to sinners to return to Him for Jesus' sake, will also, for the sake of Christ, with mercy cover the original sin of infants thus removed, and with His grace so fill their hearts, that they shall be preserved from sin, and so from suffering, for evermore.

It may be to this great benefit of Jesus' sacrifice—at least in part—that Christ refers in the text. At all events, we believe that in the strictest sense, the angels, the spirits of these little ones, do always behold the face of their Father who is in heaven. "They die, for Adam sinned; they live, for Jesus died." Through the first Adam they suffer temporal death, which is the wages of sin; through the second Adam they receive eternal life, which is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

There are some, indeed, who think that it is only baptized infants who are saved. They are regenerated then, they say, and so fitted for

heaven. But baptism, the sign, is often given where grace is not received. Many who are baptized are not *indeed* God's children, and grow up to be very wicked. And many, we believe, enter heaven like the thief upon the cross, with no water of baptism ever sprinkled upon their face. I could not believe in the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, especially to little ones, and yet believe in the utter destruction and eternal misery of those whose parents wanted opportunity or inclination to bring them to the baptismal font, and whom death stamped with his impress before the gospel covenant could stamp them with the sign and seal of all its blessings and its grace. I rejoice that the Bible gives no countenance to such a view. Christ is the same in heaven as he was on earth, and methinks I can see him, as children, even unbaptized children, enter the spirit land, stretching out his arms to welcome them, and hear him saying,—even while harsh men on earth enunciate their cruel creed, that children dying unbaptized must be for ever damned,—“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

Here then is comfort for those parents that have lost their little ones in infancy. They may not have the same crown of glory which the faithful soldier that has fought on earth the battles of the Lord shall wear, but they that fight on the battle-field of time, are not always conquerors. Be submissive, then. Many would have been thankful if God had taken away their children, as He has done yours, by death, from evil to come. It is not an enemy that is dragging your little ones away to misery. It is your Father who hath come to your garden, to pluck for himself a budding flower, to place it in his own bosom, and to take it up to the palace and the paradise above. It is "The Children's Friend" who is saying to you, as you see that dear one writhing on its death-bed, whom you fain would cling to and keep with you on the earth: "Suffer the little child to come *unto me*, and forbid it not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

In conclusion. Does not this Children's Friend *deserve all children's hearts and love?* Your fathers, and mothers, and brothers, and

sisters, and friends, all love you, and you love them ; but—

One is kind above all others,
Oh, how he loves ! ”

Show your love to him by doing good, and hating evil. When your parents brought you in the arms of faith and love to him in your infancy, he smiled on them and you. When he sees you coming with them to the cross and to the throne of grace in your childhood, still how loving is his smile ! When he sees you tempted by the world and the flesh, oh, how deeply he is grieved ! And as others try to keep you back from goodness and from God, how sorely still Christ is displeased ; how sternly he says to such, “ Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God ! ”
Amen.

III.

Bad Companions.

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."—PROV. I. 10.



I HAVE already told you in a former sermon, that Jesus Christ wishes you to come to him, saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God," and that your fathers and mothers wish you to come with them to church, and your teachers to the Sabbath school, to bring you nearer Christ, and so to make you holy and happy here and hereafter.

But it is not only good people that tell you to go with them. It is not only Christ that bids you come to him. Bad people are constantly trying to get you to go with them. Satan is constantly trying to get you to go to him, and not to Christ. Of course, you cannot see him any more than you can see

Christ. If the devil were to appear to us, and if we knew who he was, we would all be terrified to go near him. But, for all that, he is beside us very often. He is always going to and fro like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He does not now, indeed, take the form of a serpent, as he did in Eden, and make it the instrument of his purposes. But he has instruments still to do what he desires. He cannot be everywhere at the same time, for he is not infinite and omnipresent like God ; but—just as a tyrant having a large kingdom can rule in every part of it by his servants, though he is not personally present—so can Satan do by his agents and emissaries what he may not be present to do himself. And who are his agents ?

The *bad angels* are. Before men were made in this world, there had been angels made in another world, and the devil got them to sin, and then he and they were driven out of their paradise, as Adam and Eve were driven out of theirs. They were cast into hell—a dark and dreary world—waiting there for the judgment of the great day. But, in the meantime, they are allowed

I. First, then, as to the danger spoken of, The enticement of sinners. "If sinners entice thee."

To entice means to allure, to incite, to urge to sin, to bribe to it. Sometimes there may be no enticing. There is danger even then. We cannot be beside such people without great risk of harm. Just as persons living in a particular district have a common burr or accent, or mode of speaking, so in a bad neighbourhood children are apt to be corrupted, and to grow up accustomed to wickedness. It is of the nature of sin to corrupt, just as it is the nature of fever to infect, or of fire to spread. If, therefore, we are much in contact with sinners, it is like being much beside a fever patient, and we are very apt to be infected. It is like standing with very inflammable dresses near a raging fire. Can we expect to escape?

But this is not all the danger. These bad people very often wish others to be as bad as themselves, and do all they can to get you to sin. Sometimes it may not be so. Fathers may drink, and yet earnestly wish their sons to keep from it. Mothers may

be bad, and yet seek to keep their daughters from vice. They may send them to church, though they never go to it, and be glad to hear them reading the Bible, and saying their prayers, though they themselves cannot read and do not pray. So Dives is represented—even in hell—as wishing to keep back his brothers from the misery which he endured. But where there are no such ties of nature, ay, and often even though there are, sinners try all they can to make others as wicked as themselves.

You may say, What good can that do to them? It will not make their sin the less, or their punishment the lighter. No; it will not. And that all the more shows the exceeding sinfulness of sinners. They actually rejoice in doing evil without profit, and in making others bad without benefit to themselves. So the devil and the fallen angels after they were *rebels* became *tempters*, and wrecked the innocence of our first parents in Eden. So even boys will swear without getting anything by it. So Augustine, in his Confessions, tells us that when he was a youth he went with others at dead of night and robbed a pear tree of its

fruit, though afterwards they gave it all away to other boys ; for they had better fruit themselves at home. So boys will kill birds, and break windows, and throw stones at dogs and even people, and try to frighten horses, and strike other boys, though they themselves gain nothing by it. They love mischief for its own sake, and they like to see others as bad as themselves.

I remember watching some school-boys at a kind of show that had been set up near the school. The people were annoyed with the boys looking in at the chinks of the caravan, and they had dug a hole near it, and as the day was wet, the boys did not see that it was full of water, and each as he came up plumped into the hole. The great pleasure of the boys seemed to be to *decoy others*. As each scholar came up he was enticed to the caravan, and told he would see something very nice if he looked in at a particular spot. He went, and then a roar of laughter followed his plunge. It is like the story of the fox which lost his tail in a trap, and then tried to prevail with all the other foxes to cut off their tails, telling them that

they would look far better without the you see, though it does *no good* for sin entice others to sin, they *will do it*. *If* here does not mean that this is ful, but rather it may be translated, ‘ sinners entice thee,” as they will in one other, at one time or other, and then, “(thou not.”

But although sinners, having gone themselves, may wish you to go with they would not get many if there w enticements. If they asked them me do this or that without any reason for it,—if there was to be no pleasure or then at the first boys and girls would from sin, and say, “Why should I do say that, or go there, if by the sin suffer in person or character on earth hell?” Therefore, sinners use *entic* —gradually and insensibly to lead on You have seen people fishing. They worm or fly on the hook to entice the Or setting a trap for a mouse ; or birds. They know what these creatu fond of, and they entice them with i they who wish boys and girls to sin

what they are fond of, and bait the hook accordingly. It may be fun ; it may be dress ; it may be money ; it may be some enjoyment. Just as there are women who take children into closes, bribing them with "sweetmeats," and strip them there of all their clothes, so sinners, bribing the young with *pleasures* they are fond of, strip them often of their piety, and honesty, and virtue, and character and peace. And the boy or the girl who does what is wrong for these things is enticed, takes the bait, and falls into the hand of sinners.

And what is it that sinners entice boys and girls to do ? It is to sin, to go with them, to speak as they speak, to do as they do, to walk in the way of sinners. *Now*, perhaps, they wish you to tell a lie ; *again*, to steal from your mother. *Now*, to disobey your parents ; *again*, to cheat your companions. *Now*, to loiter on your messages ; *again*, to deceive your masters. *Now*, to misbehave at the day or Sabbath school ; *again*, to break the Sabbath-day. They laugh at you for being afraid to say bad words. They ridicule the boys and girls that will not associate with them, till you begin to think it manly and bold to be

one of them, and not always to be tied to your mother's apron strings. On a holiday or New Year they will be delighted if they get boys to drink till they are the worse of it, and then they make game of them. One of the saddest sights I saw last New Year's Day was a *mere boy staggering along the street quite tipsy*. Those who gave it him were more to blame than he was. Sinners had enticed him, but he should not have consented to the sin.

You see that is one good thing—sinners, whether young or old, cannot *force* you to be bad. You must *consent*. They can only urge and coax and persuade you. They cannot make you wicked against your will. They are not like the press-gang that used to go about seizing on men and carrying them against their will on board ship to be sailors. They are like the recruiting sergeant, rather, who has no claim on any one till he takes the shilling of his own free will. As long as you do not consent, in spite of all enticements you are safe. The serpent could only *tempt* Eve to take the forbidden fruit. He could not force her. Eve could not force Adam to take it. And so still you must be willing before

the tempter can get you to sin. Surely, then, unless you wish to be rebels against God, sinful here and miserable hereafter, you will resist the devil and refuse to join the wicked. Surely you must feel that the wise King Solomon gives you good advice when he says, "My son, my daughter, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

II. Let us now, therefore, consider the Sabbath scholar's duty in the midst of danger, "Consent thou not, when sinners entice thee." The meaning of this is simple, Do not believe them; do not obey them; do not go with them; do not speak and act as they do, and as they bid you do; do not be like them. But perhaps you say, How shall we know sinners, so as to be on our guard against them? That is one of the advantages of going to the Sabbath school. You learn to read the Bible, and it tells you what sin is, and how to know the lovers of sin. When you see boys or girls, or men and women deceiving their parents, going out at night, associating with others as bad as themselves, you may be sure that these are sinners, and you must beware of their en

ticements. But again, perhaps you say, It's *nice fun* to go sometimes with them, and it's *very hard* to be kept in the house while they are enjoying themselves; and *what's the harm* of playing on Sabbath or fighting through the week? Ah! if you are beginning to reason thus, it is a sign that you have already been listening to the enticements of the sinful. There is danger—great danger near. And I must, therefore, very earnestly press this duty upon you, and give you several reasons why it ought to be performed.

1. It is your duty, because it is *your heavenly Father's command*.

It was not only the wise King Solomon that said this. It is God, the King of kings, that says it to you and me. Holy men of old wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; and in many other places of God's word the same duty is plainly set before us, as, for instance, "Come out from among them and be ye separated;" "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness;" and many other passages. Now this consideration ought to decide the whole matter. What kind of son is he who refuses to do what his father

tells him? What good can he expect to come of such disobedience? You remember the story of the little lamb that was told by its mother not to go beyond the field, for there was danger. It did go through the hedge, and *it never came back*. The fox got hold of it. So it is with many young people who go where their mothers forbid them, and do what their fathers tell them not to do. Such disobedience is very wrong and very ruinous. But, especially, *he* is guilty who *disobeys* deliberately his *heavenly Father*. He says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy;" "Be ye perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect." Do you wish God to be your enemy? Can you defy Him and prosper? Is it better to obey God or man? Oh, heed not what sinners say to you. They cannot give you life or happiness. They cannot save you or themselves at the judgment-seat. They will not bear your punishment in hell. Be like Joseph; say, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Be followers of God, as dear children; and if sinners entice you, consent ye not.

2. It is your duty, *because of Christ's love*.

You know Christ's love and his claims upon you. Not only has God preserved you till now, Christ has redeemed you for his service. Ye are not your own. And though he does not treat you as slaves, he does require you to live to him, to hate the sin that crucified him, and not to crucify him afresh by joining sinners and by committing sin. And surely, if you believe in Jesus' love you cannot consent to the enticement of sinners. It is ungrateful of a child, whom a friend or parent has done and suffered much for, to hate and oppose him. Much more of *you*, if you are the enemies of Christ. It is worse for Sabbath scholars to be wicked, than it is for those who do not know so well the truth as it is in Jesus. In the account of a vessel on fire I saw not long ago, I read of a mother saving two children, holding one in her arm, while she kept the other by its dress in her teeth, and supported herself by some piece of the wreck with the other hand till help had come. Could they ever forget that love? or, if they did, were they not very guilty? In the same account I read of a gentleman who gathered several children, whose fathers and mothers

had been burned and drowned, and kept them there in safety till a boat approached and took them off to the shore. Christ's love to us perishing outcasts was far greater. He suffered the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. He gave himself for us. And now shall we range ourselves against him? Whatever others may do, surely we will serve the Lord. Children called by the Christian name, if sinners entice *you*, consent ye *not*.

3. If you join sinners *you will suffer here and hereafter*.

At first it is like the eating and smoking of opium. It seems very pleasant to sin, but soon we begin to feel that "the wages of sin is death." The child thinks (as the moth does) the light beautiful. It tries to catch it, but soon feels in its burnt fingers that brightness of appearance may bring real harm and pain. The sword which glitters in the sunshine wounds and kills. So sinners soon find that misery is the companion of guilt. It is quite true you may not see others suffering while they sin. As the bird comes near the snare, it sees a bird there, and *it* sings as gaily as if it were free, but it is really a cap-

tive. So sinners entice by saying, Come with us, *this is pleasure*. But, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united!" The cancer is there, though it is hidden in the breast and you cannot see it. Their face smiles and all seems well, but they bear unseen *the mark of death*. Oh, it is like a sight I saw once! A young woman, the sister of an old Sabbath scholar of my own, was lying calm and smiling as in sleep. "How sweetly she smiles," I said. "Ah, but," said the person beside me, "look *further down*." Oh, what was that?—that ring, discoloured, bloody, round her neck? The mark of the rope—*the sign of death*! Weak in mind and body, she thought she would be better out of this weary world. She did not consider that it was not for her to leave the place appointed her before her time, and at night her mother left her well, and came in and found her hanging dead. Be ye then mindful of your duty, or, however outwardly you may smile, *further down* there will be *something wrong*,—something to show that sin brings suffering and death.

On the contrary, happiness comes with god-

liness. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, as well as of the life to come." I do not say you will always get credit for the good you do, but generally people will see your character, and act accordingly. Sometimes you may be blamed for wrong-doing when you are innocent, and others may get off, though they are guilty. I once saw on the street a boy stealing an apple from a basket ; he let it fall—another boy picked it up. The woman turned round, saw him, and seized him as a thief, and was going to hand him over to the police, when I interfered. The other boy was off before she discovered her mistake. But better to be accused falsely, and even to suffer, than to sin and escape. Always conscience will be easier, and we shall be happier even then. But generally, we shall be better in regard to temporal prosperity. Do not say, "What profit is there in goodness?"—"Be sure your sin will find you out." Even here it is well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked. Even in regard to this world the first Psalm is so far true. That man who walketh not astray has blessedness ; and all

he doth shall prosper well. But, in the next world, while sinners are cursed, ye shall be blessed by the Judge, and enter into the eternal joys of your Lord.

4. *Once give way to evil habits, humanly speaking you are fixing your character, and sealing your doom.* If you consent for a time, there is little hope of ever again resisting. In answer to what I have mentioned about sinners suffering, you may say, "Oh, but we will stop; we do not mean to be *always* bad!" And do you think it is easier to turn *afterwards* than to refuse to go with them *now*? No. Go down the stream of sin, you can hardly swim up against the current afterwards.

1st. Even if you wish to reform and leave your companions, you will feel *how difficult it is*. I have known such persons. And I have pitied them very much amid their difficulties and hardships. A returned convict once came to me. I had seen him frequently before. Some years ago he received a ticket-of-leave. He had tried every kind of work, but always when he got settled, his former companions wrote and *told who he was*, and got him put

out. He at length, after years of struggle, resolved to emigrate rather than consent to sin. I wish he had done so. But some difficulty came in the way after he was almost sure of getting off. And then, after years of successful struggling, in a reckless mood he stole again. His case was stated to the judges, and they very kindly gave him another chance. But even that would not do. His self-respect was now fairly lost. He had no heart to struggle any more, and ere long he was in prison and under sentence again.

And this shows, you see, how difficult his part had become by *sinning at the first*. If when sinners first enticed him, he had not consented, how much easier his task !

2d. *The will gets weakened* and enslaved by sin, and the more they sin, the less they are able to resist. I had a sad instance of this told me lately. A young man, of whom his friends were proud, went into society. Being a singer, he was much courted. He got into late hours and dissipated habits. From Edinburgh he was sent to London, to try if separation from his companions would check him. But it was too late. Custom had become his

second nature. He wished to keep right, but it faded away before the first temptation ; and he did not ask God's help and use His means of grace for the strengthening of his will and the conversion of his spiritual nature. Again as bad as ever, he was sent to America. He came back worse and worse. Then he enlisted. Again he came back, and now his craving for drink was such, that nothing in the house was safe. He stole *everything* for drink. His mother told me that the last time she saw him, she locked the door, and opened the window, and told him not to come. She knew if she gave him anything it would go for drink, and make him worse. And she feared he would take all she had for herself and her family. Oh, if sinners entice you who are not yet wedded to evil, consent ye not, or you will become *powerless to resist!*

3d. Think how *one sin leads to others*, and you will see how difficult it is to turn after you have begun to sin. One invisible cord after another ties the sinner down, and he goes *step by step far into the fields of sin*. It may seem a little thing to go out at night with other boys or girls, but think *what it*

will lead to. "Come to the theatre," they will say. "I have no money," you tell them. "Oh, we'll sing to get it!" They begin to sing on the streets to gather pennies to get in. "Oh, I'll get something and sell it!" and so a boy goes and steals two cups from his mother's press, and offers them for sale. "Oh, I have a good shirt; we'll get threepence for it!" and so he takes the very shirt off his back to get to the theatre. And when they get in, they meet with others worse than themselves, and go on from bad to worse, from vice to vice, from vice to crime. These things have happened under my own observation, and similar things are happening every day. Would ye act such a part? Dear children, if sinners entice you, consent you not.

And now before I close, I must tell you how to keep from consenting to the enticements of sinners.

1. Keep away from the wicked. Do not be bold, thinking there is no danger. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." "Shall a man take fire into his bosom, and not be burned, or pitch into his hand, and not be defiled?" Like the young woman who

went to Rome to convert the pope, but was converted herself by him, many young women, thinking they are safe, associate with bad young men, fancying they will yield to them, and that they will be able to keep them from drink and wrong-doing. Too often they are found gradually consenting to evil, and yielding to sin. Associate with the good ; go with them ; let them lead you to the cross of Christ ; Christ will lead you to God ; God will guide you to heaven. You will regret, in time and in eternity, going to the theatre, wandering about at night amid the temptations of the city and the streets, spending your Sabbaths in idleness and pleasure, and listening to the language of the immoral and profane. But you will *never regret* going to hear what is good, reading God's word, keeping God's day, praying for God's grace, and doing God's will.

2. Pray to God, and he will keep you even as the apple of his eye. And thus praying you will get good by your attendance at your Sabbath class. I saw a very pleasant sight not long ago. There was a place which I had to pass every Sabbath afternoon, where a

number of boys used always to meet. I saw them playing, and I could not get them to give it up. They swore so that I might hear them, and the older made the younger bold. There was a Sabbath school opened in that neighbourhood. The worst of the boys are ashamed now to play there. Most of them attend the school. And when I pass now, I very often see boys sitting with their Bibles learning their lessons for the Sabbath class. That shows what good it may be the means of doing. Do not be ashamed of being Sabbath scholars. Do not think you are too big or too old to learn what is good.

There are many things you may consent to do with safety. You may be enticed to go to school by the prospect of a prize, or to a trade by the prospect of money ; to service by the hope of wages ; to some shop by the prospect of getting up in the world ; but never consent to the enticements of sinners. Oh ! hard as it would be for your parents to see you enlisting and becoming soldiers, or going to the sea as sailors, or emigrating to Australia and leaving them at home, yet if you were well behaved it would be better for you and

pleasanter for them, than if you were to stay beside them all your life, breaking their hearts by your sins. Though others, then, laugh at you for keeping the house, for your sober dress, for your quietness and cowardice, let it be so. Better that than for you to put yourself, by dress, and fighting, and wandering about, in the way of temptations and sinners. There is a proverb which says, "They laugh well who laugh *the last*." Remember that. Acting as God would have you, He will bless you ; you will be His sons and daughters. Do not be afraid though you go among strangers. You have Him still for your friend after you have left your home.

Oh, then, always avoid evil and bad companions! Think of your mother's tears, and prayers, and anxieties, and ever hear her say in these words of my text. When you are far away, and temptations come, oh, hearken to your father! Even though dead, let him speak to you still, repeating them. But above all, lead lives as seeing the invisible God. Feel every time you are tempted to wrong-doing that God's Spirit is striving with you, that Christ is watching you with deep

anxiety, and that God, your heavenly Father, is saying to you, "My son, though sinners entice you, consent you not." Then, when you leave for ever earthly scenes and companions, He will take you *home*, where there shall no more be any enticements of sin, and no more any companionship of sinners. Amen.

IV

Little Sins.

"Jonathan said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand, and lo, I must die."—1 SAM. xiv. 43.



YOU know who Jonathan was? He was the son of Saul, and Saul was king of Israel. Just before this, Saul and his army were encamped opposite the army of the Philistines, who were more numerous than the Israelites, and were prevailing against them. The king's son determined to drive the enemy away from their encampment. There was a rock to climb, and Jonathan and his armour-bearer climbed it on their hands and their feet. They killed twenty men of the garrison of the Philistines, and those that fled spread confusion in the camp, and the army believed that a great number of the Israelites had climbed the rocks, and were already among them. And so they began to fight with one

another. In the meantime, Saul knowing what Jonathan had done, sent his soldiers to the battle. And then the Israelites that had deserted to the Philistines began to fight against them, and those that had taken no part in the conflict joined themselves to Saul, and the Philistines were beat and fled.

Now Saul had made the people swear that they would follow after the Philistines till the evening, and that they would not stop *to taste any food*. Jonathan did not hear this, being away with his armour-bearer, and in going through the wood, he put his staff into a honey-comb, and lifted it, and *took the honey*. Thus he was refreshed. But he had brought himself unwittingly and unknowingly under his father's curse. He was told the people had been made to promise and swear, and then instead of being sorry, he said, "His father had been very foolish in acting as he had done."

God was angry, for Jonathan, after he knew the people's oath, did not acknowledge his fault, or tell what he had done. So Saul the king assembled the people, that God might draw by lot the person who was guilty in His

sight. Saul and Jonathan were put on one side, and the people on the other; and Saul and Jonathan were taken, but the people escaped. Lots were then cast between Saul and Jonathan, and Jonathan was taken. It was clear now that Jonathan had done something which he had not told, and so displeased the God of Israel; and Saul said to him, "Tell me what thou hast done." And Jonathan told him, and said, "I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and lo, I must die."

Now, my dear children, you often do wrong, and plead like Jonathan that *you did not know*. Of course it is a good excuse if you *could* not know. But if you do things without trying to find out what may be the consequence, you are acting very wrongly. Jonathan might have asked what his father's orders were, and any of the people would have told him. And so, if you do a thing rashly, it will not do to say you did not know.

A boy threw a big stone over a wall. There was a poor woman with a baby there, and the stone struck the baby, and lamed it for life. The boy was caught, and said, "I

did not know there was anybody there." But he should have known there was *nobody* there before he threw the stone. There might be, for ought he knew, and therefore it was very bad to throw and take his chance.

A boy found his father's gun and presented it at his sister. He pulled the trigger, and killed her. "Oh," he said, "I did not know the gun was loaded." But he should not have meddled with the gun. He did not know whether it was loaded or not, and so his sinful rashness was the death of his poor sister.

Well, but Jonathan did worse than this. After he did know, he *did not think he was to blame at all*. It was all his father's blame, making the people promise not to eat. *He* had done quite right. So with boys and girls very often. Their father, or their mother, or their teacher tells them not to do a certain thing. They do it, and then say, "What's about it?—it is not much. They had no business to do this, and am I to be punished for that?" When Jonathan was told he must die for his sin, he said, "What! must I die for tasting a little honey?" When Eve was told she must die for her sin, she said,

“What! for that? It is only an apple, and, besides, the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.” When Adam was told he must die for his sin, he said to God, “It was only some fruit I got from Eve. The woman whom *thou* gavest to be with me, she gave me of the fruit, and I did eat.” So young people, and old people, too, when charged with wrong doing, are always ready with some excuse. He had no business to do this, or, it was not my fault, or, what did I do? Only so-and-so, and am I to be punished for that? So young men and women commit sin. They know they are doing wrong; but it is only tasting a little honey, and lo, they must suffer and die. They think it is very hard. It is harsh of their father, and mother, and master, to blame them for that. It is harsh in God to punish them for that. They are not sorry for what they have done. It is a mere trifle. It is the severe punishment they regret. Like Jonathan, they say, “I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand, and lo, I must die.”

But Jonathan did worse than even this. He *concealed what he had done*. God was

angry, and the offender was to be taken by lot. Jonathan did not come forward and say, "Let not the people be punished for my fault, I alone am to blame." His sin had to find him out. And so it is often with boys and girls. They do something wrong. If they candidly confessed it, it would be all well, but they don't, and often the innocent are blamed. They say to their companions, "Don't tell," and the consequence is, the suspicion falls on persons who are not to blame at all.

Some boys asked their mamma to invite their companions to tea. She did so, and gave them some nice cakes. There were some over, and she told the servant to put them in the press. Next day they were amissing. The boys were called in. Each of them was asked, "Did you steal the cakes?" "No," each of the boys replied. The blame fell upon the servants. But that night the crumbs and fragments of the cakes were found in the pocket of one of the boys. Not only had he been guilty of stealing; he had made his mother suspect his brothers, and her servants, and had made his sin far greater by concealing it, like Jonathan, till his sin found him

out. I daresay the boy thought, "Oh, it is a very little sin to take a cake, and if it is not known, there is no harm done." But, you see, there *was* harm. He did wrong. He made the innocent suspected. He was found out to be both a liar and a thief.

Now, I want seriously to speak to you in this sermon about these *little sins*. I want you to avoid them. I shall tell you *why* before I close; but first, I want to impress upon you, that *what you call little sins may not be trifling in the sight of God*.

1. The thing you do may be a very *small and simple* one, yet it may *not* be a *little* sin. You may only speak a word or two, but these few words may be lies or oaths; and swearing and falsehood are not little sins. If we were to measure the littleness of a sin by the littleness of the act, the worst people would get off very easily. Adam and Eve might have said, "Surely it was a little sin to steal an apple." But the wages of that sin was death. A man may say, "Surely, it is not much to write down a person's name." But forgery is nothing more. What about putting a little white powder into a cup? But that is arsenic,

and poisons the person you give it to. It is a very little act the pulling of a trigger, but that is the way in which murder is often committed. These sins and crimes are not little, because the acts connected with them are but little.

Before such acts can be done, there must be very bad feelings and wishes in the heart ; there must be no fear of God, no love to men, no proper principle, a world of corruption ; and it is this appalling inward state of things that makes the sin a very great one, though the act should be as little as that of Jonathan, who did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in his hand. Remember, then, that a little act does not always imply a little sin, and that by a little thought or wish, a short word or a very simple act, you may offend God very much, and be guilty of a great sin.

2. But, in the second place, Do not think that because *you are little*, all your *sins* must be *little* ones.

Boys and girls who are young in years, are sometimes very old in vice. They are up to all sorts of sins, and without a blush or a

scruple, do and say things that many people older than themselves would be ashamed to say and do. I have myself seen young people very wicked and hardened. You could not believe them for their lies. They could not speak without swearing. They could not associate with others without quarrelling ; and they had been many times in jail for theft.

Some time ago, I read in the papers of a girl, fourteen years old, who stole some money out of a drawer in her mistress's bedroom. It was not much, and she thought it would not be missed. But it was, and she was charged with it. And what did she do next? It shows how one sin leads to more. There was some arsenic in the house, for poisoning rats. She put some of it into her mistress's tea, and gave it her to drink. Fortunately, she did not drink it all, and, though she was very ill, she did not die. But that did not make the girl any better. She meant to kill her, that she might never be able to tell about the money that had been stolen from her drawer.

Do not think, then, that little people cannot commit great sins. The sins you are guilty of are not all little because you are young,

any more than the sins your fathers and mothers commit are all great because they are big and old. Yet there are certain sins which boys and girls are very apt to be guilty of, sins which do not show such great wickedness as to make people say they are very bad young people, and which, in comparison with other sins and older people, we may term *little sins*. They are done in ignorance, or through thoughtlessness, or carelessness, or because, being young, they have not sense to see all the evil they are doing, or those that do them are sorry for them when they come to think of them, and see the evil of them. There are little outbursts of passion, little fibs, little acts of disobedience, inattention to orders, truant playing, taking sweetmeats that their mother has not allowed them to take, spending their halfpennies all upon themselves, forgetting the Sabbath-day to keep it holy, doing things they know their father would be angry at, and then saying to their sisters, "Don't tell, if you do, I'll give it you." There are absences from the school and from the church when they should be there, rudeness and speaking back when they are cor

free. He told him he had no authority to do that. However, a gentleman who was a passenger, seeing the old man's anxiety and distress, paid his fare, and he got safe to Glasgow. He was directed out of the town on the way to the village, and as he was getting into the country, it was evening, and the poor father, who had not slept any the night before, was tired, for he was very old. He saw some boys playing: he asked them if they knew the village. One boy winked to the other and said, "Don't you speak." He then told the old man to keep to his left hand and go on about three miles, and he would come to the village. After he went away the boys burst out laughing, and said, "Haven't we given the old fellow a fine cheat?" and they began to play and thought no more about it. After nearly an hour of wandering, the poor father—not coming to any village—asked again, and found he had been sent in the very opposite direction. With a heavy heart, and weary limbs, he turned back, and at last—about midnight—found the place where his poor son lay. What was it he saw? Nothing but his dead body. All that

evening the poor prodigal had been in terrible distress because his father had not come. He thought he had refused to forgive him, and bless him before he died. This fear made him worse, and he had expired but a few minutes before the father came in. Oh, what *misery* these boys had wrought *for fun*!

I know this is a thing which cannot happen very often, but something like it very often does take place, and by boys and girls doing things, and saying things which they only mean in joke, other people are made to suffer in terrible earnest. Beware, then, oh, beware of little sins. You don't know how much harm and injury they may do.

II. Your little sins make *other people sin*.

Put a bad boy in a class at school, and see how soon he makes a change upon the rest. They think it clever to be like him—to cheat, to strike, to lie, to swear, to play tricks; to be rude, and disobedient, and unmannerly, like him. Or his ill-usage makes them bad too and draws out feelings of anger and wishes for revenge which they would not have otherwise felt. He has made them worse than they

would have been. Remember, then, others are daily copying from you as you are copying from them. Do not *you* indulge, then, in little sins, or *they* will do so too, and on the day of judgment curse you for teaching them wrong, and putting bad feelings into their heart. Do not you associate with those who have bad habits of speech or conduct, for their sins—ay, even little sins—will have a bad effect upon you. I appeal to your fathers and mothers to say whether they have not often noticed this, and said, “Johnie used to be a good boy; but since he went to this school, or that place, or with such a boy, there’s no getting him to do what we wish,—and he has learned such strange words, and he is constantly quarrelling at home.” Beware, then, again I say, of little sins in yourselves or others. They are infectious. They spread and destroy all around, like flames of fire.

III. Your little sins may be *signs of great corruption*; and if unrepented of, they are sure to lead you on to *great sins* and *eternal death*.

Even a child is known by his doings,

whether he be good or whether he be evil. As a doctor knows by seeing the tongue, or hearing the cough, that there is something radically wrong with the *body*, so may we, by hearing a boy's language, or seeing his conduct in a very little matter, know that he has a *bad spirit*. He is at dinner, and he shows his greed; he is asked by his sister to do something, and he won't oblige her; he tears the wings from flies; he throws stones at birds; he loves to torment cats and dogs; he takes eggs out of nests; and needs again and again to be told to do a thing before it is done.

Ah! these are *bad signs*. A mother who sees her child out in the shoulder, or weak, or stooping, or coughing, is very anxious, and tries to stop these things at once, for fear of worse. Mothers should be much more anxious when they see the symptoms I have spoken of, and seek by prayer, by firmness, and, if need be, by severe punishment wisely—yes, it must be very wisely—administered, to stop these beginnings of awful evil, of eternal death. The sapling may be bent now—the tree will soon be too tough for bending. Every day there may be only a *little* more;

but these make great corruption known, and lead to greater sins than themselves.

A little leak neglected lets in the water that destroys the ship. A slight cold unchecked ends in consumption and death. So with little sins. If they are not checked, they roll along like a river of corruption, gathering as they go, and widening and deepening more and more. The river Thames not long ago was so filthy and putrid, that men could not abide the smell of it, and many were poisoned by its breath. Its filth is gathered from separate houses and manufactures. And each person might say, All that flows into it from us can make no difference. But every little makes up the sum, and helps to produce disease and death.

So the boy thinks of his little sins. What though he has told a fib, or struck his sister, or been away once or twice from school. These are little things. Ay, but they together form a very sinful character; and the wages of such sin is *death*. The coral insects working beneath the water do but little at a time, but the combined results are rocks, and even islands, rising from the ocean, whereon

man can dwell. It is in childhood and youth that habits are formed. If you indulge in little sins now, you are almost sure to go on and on to greater sins hereafter. But if you pray, and watch, and strive against them now, it will be comparatively easy in your after life to keep from great and open sins.

The very fact that they are little makes you apt to slight them. Many a boy who would not steal a pot of jelly, would take a spoonful. Many a girl who would not take a purse, would keep the purse she finds, and say nothing about it, for fear she should need to give it back to the person it belongs to. You have seen, perhaps, a wood-cutter, when he wants to rive asunder the trunk of a tree, taking a wedge with a very thin end, but gradually thickening behind. He introduces the *thin* end, and gradually *all the wedge* is driven in, and the trunk is riven asunder. So Satan begins with a very little sin; then he introduces greater, till every good feeling and principle is torn, and the whole moral framework riven asunder, and fitted for the burning. Yes, the soul that *sinneth, it shall die*. Every sin deserves God's wrath and

curse. How much more shall you be destroyed, if your sins go on increasing with your years; if your hearts are more hardened, and your lives more wicked, and your character more vile, and your conduct more depraved, the longer you live. Your sins may be sweet at the time, but in a very little comes the bitterness of death. The berry may look beautiful, but it is poisonous; and you will soon feel it to be so. The fruit is pleasant to young men and women to the sight; but it is forbidden fruit, growing on a tree of death. Your eyes may be lightened for the moment by the tasting of the honey, but lo, the doom is near and terrible! It is with every sinner as it was with Jonathan. He did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in his hand, and lo, *he must die*.

Jonathan, however, did not then, perhaps, deserve to die; for Saul here, as on many other occasions, acted rashly. *Our King*, however, never acts harshly or rashly; and if *He* sentences us to death, we may be sure the doom is merited. Yet *we, like Jonathan, have an Advocate and Intercessor*. In his case it was the people who delivered him from death.

In our case it is Christ the Lord. The wages of our sin is death ; but eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Should you not serve that King faithfully who thus delivers you from destruction ? Should you not love that Saviour who died to give you life ? It is for this—to learn to love the Lord—that you are at the Sabbath school ; and if you are led to love and serve him, you will be your teachers' crown in the day of the Lord. Yes, bright flowers in their garland, and flowers that bloom in heaven, because they were cared for and trained by them on the earth. Think of this, teachers. Be encouraged by the thought. Look up to your Master. Look forward for your reward. "In due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not."

But though God in Christ redeems his lambs and sheep from everlasting death, he does not save them from *death temporal*. Jonathan said, "Lo, I must die." Every one here may echo that, and say most truly, "Lo, I must die."

It may be you will die very young, like a little child I went to see. She was very ill. I asked if she would like me to pray with her. She thought I meant her to say her prayers,

and she began, but could not go on, she was so weak. In a day or two after she called her mamma to her little bed, and said, "Good bye, mamma," and in a minute she was dead.

It may be in the prime of life, and far away from home. Lately I was called on by a poor widow, mother of one of our old Sabbath scholars. He had gone to sea, and left New York with a vessel last year, and took ill, and lay for a number of days ill in the hospital of Rio Janeiro, and died there. Oh, I think of him looking back to Lady Yester's school, reading there the Bible his Sabbath-school teacher had given him, repenting of many follies, and dying in peace. I know he did so think of home and us, for he sent for the mate, and told him to let *us* know about his death. Be prepared, then, for death, by living as in your heavenly Father's sight.

It will be sad for your earthly parents and friends to lose you. I have often seen the parting. And at the funeral of a loved or of an only child, the sobbings, especially of the bereaved mother, are utterly agonizing. It is terrible even for a spectator to see the mother gently going to the coffin, just before it is

screwed down, and lifting off the grave-clothes, and impressing the last kiss on those dear lips, and leaving hot tears on that cold face, and then bursting out afresh into a frenzy of grief. And it will be sad for your brothers and sisters, in their prayers to have to say, instead of "God bless brother and sister," only "God bless brother," and to think that their *sister* is *dead*. Not long ago there was a little girl, one of our scholars, burned to death. Her brother, after she died, began to say his prayer as usual. He came to this, "God bless Sarah and Elizabeth," and there he stopped. "Mamma," said he, "I need not ask God to bless Elizabeth, for she is away ; but why did God take her away ? Elizabeth was not *bad* ; she did not need to be taken away ; and God must be bad to take my good sister, and I won't go to Him." He was very, very young, and fancied the grave—the *black-hole*, as he called it—was a kind of police-office, to which his sister had been carried. But older brothers and sisters, knowing more, will feel it more, when in their prayers they must miss out a brother's or a sister's, a father's or a mother's name. But they are taken from evil, perhaps

far worse than death, to come ; and it may be that many of these fathers and mothers will yet wish, in the bitterness of grief, that their sinful prodigal had died, like his brother, when a child.

Let us pray and strive to live and die so that we may be for ever with the Lord. Parents, help us—try to keep your children even from *little sins*. Exercise all your thought, use all your power, to keep them from the fatal influence of bad companionship. You have heard of the lapwing, that counterfeits lameness, and makes sounds as of pain, and appearances of weakness, to lead the intruder after her, and away *from her young*. So be wise and prudent, though not deceitful, in trying to lead seducing tempters from your little ones, that they may be preserved for Christ, for heaven. And, children, love ye the Lord. If you love sin, the pleasure will be only for a moment, but the pain will be for ever. You will have bitter reason on your death-bed to say with Jonathan, “I have but tasted a little honey in my life of sin, and, lo, as the wages of my sin, I must die an everlasting death.” Amen.

V.

Earthly and Heavenly Friends.

"Have ye a father or a brother?"—GEN. xliv. 19.



It was Joseph that asked this question of his brethren. Every Sabbath scholar knows about Joseph; about his coat of many colours; about his being put into a pit, and being sold into Egypt; about his telling the king that a famine was to come, when no corn would grow, and bidding him lay up a large supply at once, to be prepared for the famine when it came. Well, the famine did come, and Joseph's brethren, the bad men that sold him into Egypt, had nothing to eat. They did not know that it was their brother who had all the power of giving out corn in Egypt. But they heard there was corn there, and as they had none at home they had to go to Egypt to get it. When Joseph saw them he knew them, though they did not know him.

He wanted to know about Jacob his father and about Benjamin his youngest brother. And so he said to them, without saying he was Joseph, "Have ye a father or a brother?"

The next verse tells us what they said. But I must not begin about Joseph's history. If I were, I might speak about it all night, and I don't want to do that. Instead of speaking about Joseph's friends, I want to speak to you about your own friends, and the way you behave to them, and about goodness and Christ. And I hope every boy and girl that reads this sermon will remember something of what it says. Surely, at any rate, you will all remember the two heads. I am to speak about,

I. *Friends on earth*, and,—

II. *Friends in heaven*.

I. About friends on earth, and your conduct to them.

I shall speak to you of good friends, of bad friends, and of dead friends. 1. Of good friends. Have you a father or a brother? Oh yes, some of you will say at once. We have a father and a mother; we have a bro-

ther and a sister ; we have uncles and aunts, and a great many friends besides.

Well, how do you show your love to your father? He has done a great deal for you. Many a shilling which he has had to work for, he has given for food, and clothes, and schooling for you. Many a day, when you were playing, he was toiling hard on your account. Many a night, when you were sleeping soundly, he was thinking and thinking how to get you on in life. Many a good advice he has given you. Many a danger he has kept you from. Many a day he has told you of your duty to God. Many a Sabbath he has brought you with him to the house of God. Well, that is what your father has been doing for you. What have you been doing to him?

When he comes home at night, tired and weary, do you tease and vex him by your crying, and quarrelling, and disobedience? Has he to tell you over and over to do what he wishes? Do you actually say, "No, I won't," to something he desires? Or are you always ready with a smile to meet him, and to do what he wants you—to read to him; to go

with him ; to learn your lessons, and to say them to him, even though it should take you away from your companions or stop you in your play ; and to go without something you wanted him to give you, when he told you that you could not have it now. Solomon was a very wise man, and this is what he says to boys and girls, "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law."

Many of you have mothers too, as well as fathers, loving and kind. How do you show your love to your mother ? It was she who nursed you when you were quite a baby. It was she who carried you about, and watched over you, and hushed you to sleep before you could walk or speak or thank her for her love. Perhaps, after you grew up to be boys and girls, some of you became ill, and were long confined to bed. Who was it who came in to cheer you up when you were lying sick ? Your mother's smiles and cheerful words did you more good *then*, perhaps, than all the doctor's medicines. Or, perhaps, you have had to lie for days and nights and weeks in

fever, tossing and often insensible. Who was it then, that, heedless of her danger and freely risking her own life, watched by you every hour, quenching your intolerable thirst, cooling your parched lips and hands, bathing with cold water, with which ever and anon her own hot tears would mingle, your fevered brow and aching head, and wakening by her well-known voice one thought of pleasure amid all these madnesses and pains?

And as Sabbath scholars you have *her* to thank. She hears the lessons which the teacher bids you learn. To her at night before you go to bed you say your prayer, or rather I should say she hears you saying your prayer to God. Well, dear children, do you ever thank God for giving you such a mother? Do you ever pray to God to keep her living and well? Do you refuse to do what she tells you, and go with bad boys and girls, and say bad words when she desires you not? If so, you are sinning against God. What about it though you go every Sabbath to the school, and though your names have been read out as regular, attentive scholars there, and though you get a little prize to tell your mother what is thought

of you, if all the time she knows that you are not improving, that you are becoming wilder as you grow older, that you are ill-behaved at home, that she has to do things for you and for herself that you should do for her or for yourselves, and if your conduct makes her every day more fearful lest in some few years you should be pointed at by every one as bad men and women, and bring disgrace on all connected with you?

Yes! remember that people seeing your bad conduct will think ill of those who have brought you up. I have read of a little boy, who was very well trained by a good mother, coming in after dinner to get some fruit, and a gentleman asked him to sit down beside him. He was very kind to the little boy. But that gentleman used some improper language in his conversation. He was a swearer, and like every other, that habit was fallen into when he did not mean it, when he was unconscious of it. Before the boy went away his father said to him, "Well, this gentleman has been very kind to you; what do you think of him?" The little boy replied, "I think he cannot have had a *good mamma*, or else he would

not say such naughty words." The gentleman's face flushed. He could not speak ; he rose ; was silent and sad all the evening, and it is said he was more careful than ever never to swear again. And yet *he had a good mother*. He was a Scotchman. He had learned to pray, and been perhaps at a Sabbath school. But by-and-by very likely he thought himself too big to be a Sunday scholar, and, at any rate, he thought he need not pray now as he had done at his mother's knee. Then he thought it manly to swear, and use an oath like some wicked young men he went with. But this child's words had a good influence over him. They brought back early associations, and scenes of childhood, and memories of his mother, and showed that parents and teachers should not despair because their children do not *grow up* so good as they would like. Let me tell you again in the words of King Solomon, "My son, my daughter, keep thy father's commandments, and forsake not the law of thy mother ; bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest it shall lead thee ; when thou sleepest it shall keep thee,

and when thou awakest it shall talk with thee."

Alas! it is very saddening in the present day to see so little love for parents. Boys and girls begin to work and make a little for themselves. How disrespectfully they begin to speak of and to their father and mother. By what strange names they call them! How independently they act! They leave them; they marry; they form other relationships without once thinking of their parents' needs, or feeling themselves bound to pay back either in money or affection all they have gotten from them.

If they give, it is *very little*, and perhaps that little is given with a grudge, or a boast; or if they do not need to give them they pay no attention *to their feelings*. There is no child called after its grandfather or grandmother, and few and short visits are paid to those who did in early life so much for them. But I know it is not always thus. Many a servant is helping to pay her mother's rent, or with a noble spirit,—yes, with a *proper pride*,—is keeping her father from being a burden to others. Many a son is making a great, but

to him a pleasant sacrifice, not to pay back the debt he owes—he does not think that possible—but to show his gratitude to those who have the first and strongest claim upon his love. There are visits and letters from sons and daughters that gladden many parents' hearts and homes, and prayers to God for a blessing upon them. There are marriages that only strengthen filial love, and knit in closer bonds friends new and old ; and *poor* relatives that are looked on as entitled to a part of that which richer friends have gotten from the God of Providence. But there are many like Joseph's brethren—bringing down their father's head with sorrow to the grave. Dear young friends, act ye a different part from theirs. “Honour your father and your mother.” “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” You will not always have your father and your mother to obey, to honour, and love.

But my text speaks of *a brother* also. “Have ye a father or a brother?”

Now then, I speak to those who have brothers and sisters alive. How are you acting to them ? It is delightful to see members of

a household growing in beauty side by side, filling one home with glee ; happy to play together, to work together, to learn together, to pray together, to see the older teaching the younger, and taking them gently to school or to church, and not speaking angrily to a little sister or striking her for every little fault. God loves to see brothers and sisters living in love. Christ loves to dwell in such a family. It is like the happy family of Bethany, where Mary and Martha and Lazarus were, and whom Jesus so much loved.

But what shall I say of boys and girls that are always quarrelling and finding fault with one another ? What does God say ? “ If such an one say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar : for if he *does not love his brother*, whom he has seen, *he cannot love the Father*, whom he has not seen.” And consider how much harm bad children do to others. Those who are around you in the same family, or in the same neighbourhood, or in the same day or Sabbath school, are very much influenced by your example, and do and say many things in imitation of you. Will it not be terrible if they are bad all through life

because they have sought to be like you? If they die, they curse you for teaching them what was wicked, and setting them a bad example in their youth. Try rather to do good to boys and girls, even to those whom you have never seen. Give a little and pray a great deal for the bad boys and girls of this town, that they may be made good—for the ignorant, that they may learn to read. Think of your friends that are far away across the seas, and pray to God for them, and also for the heathen young people abroad, that they may get the Bible sent to them, and learn to say their prayers to God, and do what He commands them in His word. You can all do something to bring the young nearer God. There are ragged schools at home, and orphanages and mission schools abroad, for this; and even children can bring other little children to their Father, and carry them to Christ for his blessing, and not in vain; for he will smile on them and say, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

2. I have been taking for granted all this time that your friends are kind-friends—good,

and worthy to be loved. But *all friends are not good and kind*. There are boys and girls whose fathers very often come home swearing and drunk ; whose mothers teach them to lie by their own example, and never bid them read the Testament or pray to God ; whose brothers go with thieves ; whose sisters are in prison, or upon the way to it ; in whose home God is never praised, the Bible is never opened, the Sabbath never kept. What are you to do ? Still you are *to love your friends*. Why, even our enemies we must love—much more those who are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. You must pray for them and show a good example, and in every way try to do them good. Sing your hymns to your brother who does not come to the school. Tell your mother to hear you say your prayers—your father to hear you repeating your verse or psalm—and God will make you little missionaries at home, and your parents and brothers and sisters will be made happier and better by means of you. *Joseph's bad brethren were blessed for his sake, and through him.*

3. I have spoken of *good friends and bad*

friends, and now, before I close this head, I must say a word about *dead* friends. I dare say some of you are very sad as you read this sermon and think of the question it contains —“Have ye a father or a brother?” Why? Because your father is dead, or you are motherless bairns, or altogether orphans, or your little brother is dead, or your sister, whom you played and learned and slept with. And now sometimes on Saturdays you go to the graves of your departed friends, to weep there for those you have lost. I know, at any rate, this is the experience of many of the older members of this congregation. Few of your parents, few of your teachers, few of your grown-up friends, but have lost a father, or mother, or brother, or sister, or friend. Some of them have lost nearly all their friends, for when a person comes to the autumn of life, and begins to enter on its winter, he or she stands very much alone. A household is just like a tree that has a great many leaves in the summer, but by-and-by the tempest blows, and the leaves begin to fall, and there are few members of a family circle there where many were before. And another storm blows, and

other leaves fall down, and then how many are there left? Just that one leaf hanging all alone—no other near it. Just so, sometimes, is the aged man or woman left—a solitary leaf, waiting for the blast of death to lay it down beside the others that have fallen.

I remember once, in Perth, an old woman came in to me on a Saturday night, when I was busy with my sermon, wanting me to write out some petition for her. I said to her—I am afraid I said it rather sharply—“Cannot you get some one else to write it, and I’ll subscribe it for you? You belong to Perth, do you not?” “Yes, sir,” she said; “I do.” “And have you no friends in town?” “Yes, sir; I have. But they’re a’ lying down i’ the kirkyaird.” I did not speak sharply to that poor woman any more. But though it is mostly older people than you that have had fathers and brothers and friends taken from them, young people often suffer this way too. Not long ago, I was going by the railway to preach. A sad-looking lady came into the carriage where I was. By-and-by I saw the tears beginning to fall down her

cheeks, and it did not need much asking on my part to get from her the cause of her weeping. She had a son in an office in Edinburgh, who was very kind to her, and to whom she was very much attached. Her husband had been struck with paralysis, and his mind as well as his body was prostrated. She had an only daughter at home, about fourteen or fifteen years of age, and *she* was to have come in to Edinburgh to live with her brother, and to get her education there. But this young man's master went to London in the winter, leaving too much work and anxiety and responsibility to him. Not very well before, he caught cold—his cough increased—his cold became consumption, and very rapidly it cut him off. That poor mother, agonized herself, seemed even more afflicted on her daughter's account; and she told me that she had said, when the word came of her brother's death, "I may say I have *no father*, and now, mother, that *I've lost my brother*, I hope God will let me die too." Now that was a very wrong feeling. But many, many a one has it when a dear friend, in whom their very life is bound up, is taken away;

and oh, you should be thankful if you have a father and a brother still !

I knew a Sabbath scholar who cried bitterly when I was asking this question once. In the beginning of the year, her father went out, *quite well*, to transact some business, and *he was carried to her mother dead*. She had not a father any more. At that time the little girl's brother was a very clever and attentive scholar at our congregational Sabbath school. For three months after her father died they both came to school regularly. One Sabbath he attended in his usual health. Monday came and passed away, and he was quite well. Tuesday came, and he went out as usual to his work—for he was learning to be a printer. Then his apron caught hold of some wheels of the machinery, and in and in between the wheels that poor boy's body was dragged, and in less than a minute he was dead, and there was nothing of him left upon the earth but mangled limbs, to be kept out of his mother's sight, and buried quickly in the grave. Oh, do you wonder that that mother wept bitterly when she heard me speaking about dead friends ?


Do you wonder that that girl was very sad when she heard me asking, "Have ye a *father or a brother?*"

And now I have got through the first head about earthly friends, and spoken about *good* friends and *bad* friends, *living* friends and *dead* friends. But I have still to give you my second head, which is about your friends in heaven.

II. Have you a *Father in heaven?* have you a *Brother in heaven?*

I do not mean, have you a father that has died and gone to heaven, or a young brother whom God has taken away; but, Is God himself your Father? is Christ your elder Brother? What have you to say to that? I tell you it is your own fault if it is not so. "Like as a father pitieth his children, even so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." He says, "I will be to you a Father." He bids us say to him, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." So it is not God's fault if we have not a heavenly Father, and it is our own fault also if we have no Brother there. Do you know who it is that sits upon the

right hand of the throne of God? It is the beloved Son of your Father, and he is not ashamed to call you brethren. Yes, dear children, the great God offers to be your Father; Jesus Christ is willing to be called your Elder Brother. And now I, as God's servant, put to you this solemn question,—Have you a Father and a Brother in heaven? I tell you, *you have need of both*. Some of you have bad friends,—mothers giving you a bad example, fathers drinking, brothers stealing, or swearing, or lying. Here is a Father who will never mislead you, and a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Some of you are fatherless and motherless, but you cannot be orphans if you are the children of God; for though father and mother forsake you, He will bring you up. Your heavenly Father cannot die; your elder Brother liveth evermore. Some of you have kind, good friends still living; it is God that spares them, and it is their faith in Christ that makes them good and kind. But though they wish to see you good and happy, let me tell you, every one of you requires a heavenly Father and a heavenly Brother besides, for life and death, for time and for eternity.



Here is a son from the country. He comes in to learn a trade, or to attend the college classes. Why does he begin to drink, and go to the theatre, and do all manner of evil? It is because he is away from his earthly father, and because he does not take the God of heaven to be his guide. If he walked with God; if he felt His eye to be upon him every day and every night; if he asked Him every morning how he ought to act, and read a portion of God's *letter* when he had no word from home, do you think he would be one of those of whom Christ says, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye will do?" *There* is a girl who goes out to service. She begins to walk on Sabbath instead of going to church. She has no brother to go with her, no friend to counsel her. Yes, *she has a Brother* and a Friend. But she will not hear Christ's voice. The Sabbath bell in its ringing says, Come to Christ. But she will not; and why is she no longer in service? Why is she prowling about at night so wicked, so wretched? Why is she dying so young? Why are her parents glad when they hear that she is dead? It is because

she would not take God to be the guide of her youth. It is because she leaned upon the arm of another rather than of Christ, who wished to be to her a brother and a friend. All through life you will have need of the friendship and the love of your God and Saviour. And at death,—ay, what will you do *then* without a heavenly Father and a heavenly Brother? Your dear earthly father may say, “Oh, stay with us.” But God is calling you away. Brothers may bid you still dwell near them; but a voice that you dare not disobey calls you to a land that is very far off. And when you leave your earthly brethren, what if you have no heavenly Brother to go with you through the dark valley? When your spirit quits your earthly father’s dwelling, what if you have no mansion in a heavenly Father’s house? Think of persons going to a foreign land, and away across the sea to America or to Australia. Is it nothing that they have a father’s house to go to there, a brother’s form to stand upon the shore and meet them and welcome them home? And is it nothing, boys and girls, that you in dying have the Lord to guide you up to heaven, and God

your Father to receive you *there*? Then, though the friends you leave may pity you, you will not sorrow for **yourself**, your thoughts will be like **those** of the eldest son of a former **Duke** of Hamilton, when friends lamented round his death-bed his withdrawal at an early age from life. He took his younger brother by the hand and said, "There is indeed a *dukedom* for you, my brother, but there is a *kingdom* for me."

And yet, though we *all should have*, all *have not* a Father, have not a Brother in heaven. Though God so loved the world that he sent his Son to make us his children; though Christ died to make us members of that family of heaven, there are very many still who will not learn to call God Father, and who will not come as sinners to Christ. It is a wonder they should stay far from him. We pity the poor young slave that is torn from his home in early life and carried far away to a relentless tyrant, to be lashed and tortured far from parents and from friends. But surely we would wonder if, although return were offered to that tortured slave, he should prefer his sufferings and bondage to

release and love. Yet the enemy of God is the slave of Satan, cruelly treated by that enemy of souls, and though invited to return to God and Christ, and to heaven and happiness, he will not go. Our Father beckons men away from sin; our elder Brother bids them to mansions of his Father's house, and still how many live and die in sin and in despair, and suffer an eternal death in hell with enemies of God. Oh, then,—I must have an answer to this question,—Is your father God in heaven or Satan in hell? is your brother Jesus Christ? is *His* Holy Spirit guiding you to yonder realms of holiness and bliss?

Do you ask me how you are to know if you are God's children? I answer, Do you love *to be with your* Father in prayer? to go *to see Him* in His own house? to read His letter in His word? to hear about Him from His friends? to speak about Him to His children? to do honour to His ministers and people as the servants of God? Above all, Do you obey and serve Him in all things? Are ye like Him?—children must be *like their father*. Are ye always going nearer home, and thinking, speaking, acting more and more as He desires?

What though you are accomplished and clever, loved and honoured, if in your homes you are forgetful of God, if when you leave these homes you have no friend to help to counsel and to bless you through the whole of life? What though your father weeps over you on a death-bed, and your mother speaks of you in the most tender terms, and your brothers wish you back with them, if on the fields of eternity there is no house built for you? if among the beings of heaven there is no Father, there is no Brother for you? if the memories of your earthly home and of your Sabbath-school, and of this sermon, and of all the others you have read and heard, make the fires of hell more intolerable and the woes of eternity more dreadful? Oh, think in time! Answer as for eternity this solemn question, and whatever is the case in reference to earthly friends, see that regarding heaven you can declare "*We have,*" in answer to the question of my text, Have you a Father and a Brother there? Amen.

VI.

Childhood and Youth of Jesus.

"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom;
and the grace of God was upon him."—LUKE II. 40.



I WISH you all to be happy. I believe you can only be happy by being good, and I am sure you will be good if you are followers of Jesus. I am sure you will be happy whether you are well or ill, whether you live or die, if you seek to be like him of whom you have been hearing in these words. In a very few verses is set before us all that the New Testament tells us of the childhood and the youth of Jesus. We would have liked to know a great deal more about him in his younger days. There is always a craving to know about the forming of the character and the beginning of greatness, in their early years, of those who rise to eminence. It interests us, for example, to hear of Sir Isaac Newton, the

great mathematician, that when he was a little boy he was found by one of his uncles beneath a hedge studying the propositions of Euclid ; and that on another occasion, when a boy who was above him in the class kicked him severely on the stomach, his revenge was to labour night and day to get above him. And he persevered till he succeeded in his object. In the same way it interests, and ought to profit us to see Jesus as a boy in the Temple of Jerusalem, and at home with his parents in Nazareth. We shall not indeed find in the four gospels stories that merely gratify curiosity. There are a great many questions we ask about the early life of Jesus which the evangelists do not answer. What like was Christ ? Was he tall ? Was he dark or fair ? Was he good-looking ? How did he employ himself in Nazareth ? Was he social or retiring ? What did the neighbours think of him ? And so on.

The feeling was so strong about these and many other things among Christians in past times, that men wrote gospels—false gospels—pretending to tell what Jesus did when he was a boy. And for a time many people believed

these gospels to be true. We know now that they are false ; and the very things they tell about Jesus show it. We are told in them that when the children refused to play with him he changed them into kids ; that when a child once by accident ran against him and threw him down, he got so angry that he said to him, " Fall thou also, and never rise again ;" and the child fell down and expired. His master once struck him, and immediately his arm was withered ; and so on. If the child is father of the man, we might expect that such a boy would grow up a capricious, passionate, revengeful person. Certainly this was not the character of the meek and lowly Jesus. And it shows that Jesus was no mere man, and that the gospel writers wrote as they saw and heard, and knew that when others pretend to tell us the things that happened in his childhood, and *imagine* what he said or did, they are things that are quite unlike Christ, though very like what corrupted human beings say or do.

Even where these writers do not give Christ a bad character they only make him a young conjurer. He dyes various clothes of various

colours in the same vat ; he moulds birds and beasts from clay, and makes them leap and fly, and eat and drink from his hand ; he breaks the pitcher by accident when he is sent by his mother for water to the well, and brings the water home in his pinafore. These, and other absurd false stories, are told of the childhood and the youth of Jesus by men who had no true idea of Jesus' high and holy character. But in the word of truth, in addition to the general statement that "the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man," we have only two things specially related with regard to him. The first is about his visit to the temple of Jerusalem at twelve years old ; and the second is that in Nazareth, as he was growing up from boyhood to manhood, he was subject to his parents. In this sermon I wish to fix your thoughts, first, generally on the statements made regarding Jesus in his childhood and youth, and then specially on these two special facts mentioned with respect to him. I hope you will be very attentive, and that this sermon will do you good.

Jesus Christ was one with God, and God


cannot grow in power, or wisdom, or goodness. He was as strong a thousand years ago as he is now. He was as wise and as good in the beginning as he will be in the end of time. But Christ was also very man. And just as you get more strength, and knowledge, and deeper affections, and wider duties, as you grow up, so did Jesus Christ, your brother, the Son of man. He had a real childhood and a real youth to grow through. *There* is something, Sabbath scholars, *for you*. Christ, when he grew up, was the *Friend* of the young, saying, "Suffer the little-children to come unto me." But in his childhood and youth he was especially the *pattern* of the young. You are very apt to think, "It is quite right and easy for my father and mother to be good, to speak the truth, and go to church, and not to quarrel, and to lead a religious, Christian life ; but how can boys or girls keep from quarrelling ? *They must be foolish* and self-willed ; and it is time enough for them to be in earnest about religion after they grow up. Nobody expects *us* to be *very good*." Well, you see whether this is expected or no, here is a pattern for children, and that pattern is perfect. Jesus never in

his childhood or youth did, or said, or wished or thought, anything that was wrong. He was tempted in all things, like as you are, yet without sin. He never told a lie, or lost his temper, or used profane, improper language, or in any way committed sin. He was holy, harmless, and undefiled from the first.

When Adam and Eve were made, they were made full grown at once. When God tried them in Eden, to see whether they were dutiful and obedient, it was *not a boy and girl* he tried,—it was *a man and a woman*. If they had been mere children, we might have thought it very hard, and said, “Children believe what is said to them, and easily do as they are told. What wonder that Adam and Eve believed the serpent and obeyed him?” But God was very good to Adam and Eve. He did not permit them to be tempted with their powers unmatured, and so they had no excuse for their sin; and we as their children may be sure *we* would have done just the same as they did. We are doing just the same every day, and so are deserving of death as the wages of sin.

But in the case of Jesus Christ, the second

Adam, God did not act in the same way. He did not say to Satan, "After my Son is grown up he will be good and keep from sin." He brought him into the world as *the Babe of Bethlehem*, and even then he was the *holy child Jesus*. He let him grow up through childhood to youth, and yet all through these years he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Do not think, then, it is only after you grow up that you are to be good. *Now* remember your Creator. *Now* behold your great Example, and seek to be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the living God. I do not mean to dwell on what is said of him as he grew up, because it will take all our time to speak of the two things mentioned particularly regarding him. But just attend to this,—he had to take *food* and *sleep* like you. He did so, and *grew* in stature. He exercised his *powers*, and waxed *strong in spirit*. He *read*, and *learned*, and *thought*, and he became filled with *wisdom*. He *prayed*, and the *grace* of God was given to him. He *loved* God and man, and he *grew in favour* both with God and man.



Now, just as Jesus had a human body and a human soul, so have you. Your body needs care. You must give it proper food, and air, and exercise, and sleep, or you cannot expect to grow in strength. Many boys and girls take what they know will hurt them, or more than is good for them. They cannot resist the pleasure of self-indulgence, though they know they will suffer for it afterwards. And many are so poorly clad, and fed, and housed, that they become weak and stunted. You that are better off, pity them and help them ; and after you grow up, if you are able, while you care for their souls, try to do good to their bodies too.

We are not told, you observe, anything about Christ's personal appearance. There are pictures of him, but they do not satisfy us. I have seen a very wonderful picture of Jesus as he was supposed to be at twelve years old, when he was in the temple. There is something grand about the face and form ; but even it did not seem to me to bring out the full idea of the *divine humanity* ; and as to its being like what Jesus really was, this is what we really do not know. Some say he was

not good looking, because the prophet predicted he would have no form or *comeliness*, and when men should see him, he would have *no beauty*, that they should desire him ; but this means that the Jews would see nothing attractive in his character, and so would not care for seeing him. Others think, because he was divine, his human soul would be lodged in a very beautiful human form. But just as he was not born in a palace, so neither might he be born with great personal attractions. All we know about his bodily appearance is, that his thoughts and sorrows made him look old when he was young ; and when not yet thirty-three, he seemed nearly fifty ; so that the Jews said, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham ?"

But whatever features Jesus had, we are quite sure *he could not be ill-looking*. I have seen many handsome and well-featured boys and girls very ill-looking, because they wanted intelligence, or because they had a *proud look*, or a *hateful look*. On the other hand, if a boy or girl is thoughtful and intelligent, and especially if he or she is good, and pure, and loving, and truthful, the *lovely spirit* will shine through

all the features of the face, and give it an expression which is far *more beautiful* than a *fine complexion* and *regularity of features* ever can give. Now, Jesus had strength of will and spirit, wisdom and goodness; and therefore his must have been, in childhood, and youth, and manhood, a countenance full of energy, intelligence, and love, and therefore striking, and remarkable, and *pleasant to the sight*.

Then as to the soul. The soul has two parts,—a thinking mind and a loving heart. Now, in the *mind* of Jesus there was *wisdom*, and in the *heart* of Jesus there was *grace*. No wonder that he grew in favour with God and man.

1. He waxed strong in spirit, and became filled with wisdom. What he did he did heartily. He had energy of character. He learned at school and at home. He needed to attend and persevere, as you do. There was no miraculous agency to supersede the acquisition of knowledge. He thought as well as learned. He read the Bible, reflected on its truths, and became wiser than his teachers,—wise with the wisdom which cometh from above.

2. He saw suffering, and his sympathy deepened. He saw sin, and it became hateful exceedingly to his heart. He prayed, and God gave him his Holy Spirit without measure. He lived as God's own Son, and his Father's *grace and favour* were, day by day, abundantly bestowed.

3. He was not only God's beloved Son,—he was in favour with those around him. Though he did not flatter them, or do or say what was wrong to please them, they could trust and believe him wholly; and they knew he loved them, and wished their happiness and good. Afterwards, when he was a public teacher, and claimed to be the Messiah, they were offended in him. They expected a rich and powerful prince; and they could not bear that he should rebuke them, and warn, and teach, and pretend to be their Messiah. But even then the common people heard him gladly; and it was with great difficulty the rulers persuaded them to crucify their King. However, in private life, and especially among the young, he was a favourite. The young are natural, and give expression to their thoughts more freely than the old.

But whether among old or young, the person whom *nobody likes cannot be a follower of Christ very closely*. He must not do evil to get applause. But many things that Christians do better than others,—nay, that others cannot do,—are approved of by man as well as acceptable to God. Bad men may not always do as Christians do ; but they can respect them, and love and admire their character even while they go their own way. It is said of the Barbarians who overran the Roman Empire, that, when they heard of Christ, so gentle, and humble, and forgiving, and loving, the tears ran down their cheeks. They admired him as the noblest man they had ever heard of ; though all the while they were war-like, and cruel, and revengeful men, and would have been ashamed to show the patient, meek, forgiving spirit he displayed. So, many boys and girls, and men and women, in Nazareth, admired and honoured Jesus, though they would not live and love as he did. And so, if you are truly followers of Christ, loving others and doing them good, without surliness, and taunting, and selfishness, and pride, *you, like Jesus, will grow in*

favour with God and man. So far it is true, as has been said, the world is like a looking-glass. Smile to it and it will smile to you ; frown and so will it ; lift up your hand to strike, and another hand is straightway lifted up in wrath. Those boys and girls, therefore, that have *no friends*, that are shunned, and feared, and hated, but not loved by any, should examine themselves, to see what is the cause of it, and should remember that Jesus "grew in favour with God, and also with man."

And now let us consider the two things specially told us of Jesus in his youth. The first is, that, when he was twelve years old, he went up with his parents to Jerusalem, at the time of the Passover.

Joseph and Mary were attentive to religious duties at home, but according to Jewish custom, they came up from their homes to Jerusalem every year to keep the feast of the passover. I need not explain particularly about it. When the Jews were in Egypt, one night the angel of the Lord destroyed the first-born of the Egyptians, but *passed over* the Hebrews. It was in memory of this deliverance the *passover* was kept. At about

twelve or thirteen years of age the Jewish children began to be considered members of the congregation, and to take a part in the observances and ordinances of the Church. Jesus, now a "son of the law," went up with his parents to keep the feast; but after the days were fulfilled, Jesus remained behind. They did not miss him *during the day*, as the company was large, and they supposed he was among the neighbours. But *at night* they sought him in vain. With what a heavy heart—remembering the massacre of the innocents—must they have gone back to Jerusalem. Three days they sought him, and at last found him in the temple hearing the doctors and asking them questions.

Now, first, you are not to infer from this that boys and girls *should go away* from their parents and not tell them whither they are going. In this case, Jesus, having entered on his life as a son of the law, had to impress on Joseph and his mother that he must be now and henceforth about his Father's business. They had to be made conscious that there was dwelling in their house *the Son of God*. And this was the striking way in which the divine

Sonship of Jesus was to be fixed in their memories and hearts.

Nor, in the second place, must you think of Jesus as a *forward* boy, forgetting his youthful years in the presence of the rabbis so much older than himself. Unfortunately, this incident is sometimes spoken of as "Jesus *disputing* with the doctors." There is no such thing mentioned in the gospel. Sometimes also it is spoken of as Jesus *teaching* or *preaching* in the temple; equally unauthorized is this. There were rooms in connection with the temple in which the rabbis had sacred schools. *There* they explained the law and the word of God. In fact it was very much the same as if you went to the church to attend the Sabbath school there.

But observe two things Jesus did. He was not content to hear and learn; he *thought* and he *asked questions* for fuller information; and the questions he asked showed such understanding, and the answers he gave to their questions were so striking, that they were astonished. Again, consider Jesus had been for some days by himself. This was probably not the first occasion of his visit to the house

of God. From his answer to his parents, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not—or thought ye not—that I should be here in my Father's house about my Father's business?" it is almost certain that *he had been daily in the temple* while they had sought him sorrowing. Is it thus ye love God's house and your Sabbath class? Is it thus ye are interested in the sacred lessons ye receive there? Asking what you do not know; thinking day after day about the things of God. Ah! how many parents have sought their sons and daughters sorrowing in some great city—sought for them and found them at last—not in the church, not at the Sabbath school, but in houses where no good was to be learned, and among companions leading them further astray. If you are good you will love to hear and speak of what is good; you will love prayer and the house of prayer; you will associate with those who speak of religion and God.

Before I leave this subject, let me say to young and old, Have you not come to the city of God sometimes and seen Christ, to the church, the school, the Lord's table, and have

you not gone away and *left him behind?* Often during the day, when all is sunshine and bustle, you have never missed him ; you fancied he was near, and you could find him at any time. But *night comes*. It is not so easy to find him then. You miss him, indeed, and that is one blessing of affliction ; *it makes us think*. But oh, what weary hours we spend then, wishing for peace and Christ, and finding them not ! Go to the holy city ; go to the house of prayer ; spend not days and nights seeking help from man ; go to God's word, to the temple, to the throne of grace *at once*, repenting, trusting, praying, and *you will find Jesus*, and so have rest unto your souls. Ah ! how sad it is that too often it is only at night that we miss Jesus, and begin to seek for him. It was *in the evening* when the sun had set that the diseased were brought to Jesus to be healed. It is too frequently when sin has found us out, when, like the prodigal, we try to feed on husks and cannot, and begin to feel the miseries of sin, when the darkness of death is deepening around us, that we look to the cross, and try to creep in the midst of spiritual disease and temporal disaster

unto Jesus. What ingratitude and folly! How few can *see* the cross, can *go* to Jesus then. *Now*, while it is called to-day, let us *seek* his presence, and rejoice in communion with our Lord.

The other thing told us of Jesus is, "He went down with Joseph and his mother, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." It is good for young and old to go to church, and read God's word, and seek to believe, and understand, and obey it. But when we know those things, we are not happy. We are happy *only if we do them*. Now, in that one verse telling us that Jesus was a dutiful obedient son, how much we learn. Boys and girls sometimes think when they are in earnest about religion, I must pray, I must speak to others about their souls, and thus I shall show my goodness. Yes; but not *only* thus; show your goodness *at home*. Be good brothers and sisters. If you quarrel, and are self-willed, and selfish, and domineering, your prayers will not save you. *Prayer is not the hardest and chief thing to do*. It is easy to say in the morning and at night, "God bless my brothers and sisters;" it is far more difficult to be kind, and gentle, and forbearing,

and obliging to them all the day. I daresay many Sabbath scholars try to be good at home, but I fear some of them give their parents a great deal of trouble, by their rudeness and quarrelling, even though they never forget to say their prayers.

I read the other day of an uncle who heard a terrible noise in the nursery, and went up, and said sternly, "I must have a couple of bears introduced into this room!" They were terrified. "Yes," he said, "and the names of them are *Bear* and *Forbear*!" Bear and forbear one with another, and your nursery will be a nursery for heaven. And, like Jesus, honour, reverence, and obey your father and mother; be thankful to them when they help you. If you do not believe and obey an earthly parent, how can you believe and obey a heavenly Father? If you cannot show earthly affection and respect, how can you show love and reverence to God? It is not by doing some great thing your love is to be shown; it is by the consistent and Christlike tenor of your daily life at home. More and more I learn to judge young and old in this way; some seem stern and cold in the world,

at home they are kind ; some seem pious and religious by their church appearances, at home they are unloving, harsh, selfish, bad. *Unite* prayer and practice, worship and working, duty and devotion. *In church* learn God's will and ask God's help ; *at home* do God's will, and show that God is helping you and working in you to will and to do of his good pleasure. It is in the family we show whether, like Adam and Eve, we are determined to have our own will and our own way, or whether we can practise self-denial, trust, love, obedience.

But more than this depends on the home life. It is a sin not to obey your parents ; but *that brings in other sins* ; it leads you to disobey God. "No, I won't," to an earthly mother is the surest way to "No, I won't," to your heavenly Father. That is the case with every sin. At home, then, be always on your guard ; "watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation ;" "even a child is known by his doings." I do not say you are to do what is wrong, even if your parents, or brothers, or sisters bid you. Herodias told her daughter to ask the head of John the Baptist, and she

did, and they *both sinned* against God. But I hope your fathers and mothers are not like hers ; and if they are good, seek to make them happy ; *you can*, young as you are, *do much* by your words and works for them. Remember what the little captive maid did ; she was the means of curing of his leprosy Naaman the captain of the Syrian host, by telling her mistress about the man of God.

Let me conclude by giving you two advices :—

1. *Begin the journey of life with Christ.* You are not too young to die. I go every week almost to the funeral of some little child ; and even if you live, “now is the time.” Beza thanked God for his early piety ; but for that he said his life and death would have been less happy. And do not think it is impossible to follow Christ in youth. Even children cried “hosannah” to Christ in the temple ; and though the Pharisees were much displeased, Christ was not. He said, “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God hath perfected praise.”

2. Give yourselves wholly to goodness and God ; not on Sabbath or in some things.

Never and nowhere say or do anything wrong. I have read of some heathen nations that baptized all *but their right arm*, that it might do unchristian evil and revengeful acts. That will not do with God. "Love the Lord with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, and love your neighbours as yourselves." And to the poor among my readers, let me say, do not be ashamed of your poverty ; Jesus was born in a stable ; he was called the carpenter, and probably for years *he worked in Joseph's workshop*. Poverty is not a crime ; *labour is a privilege and a duty*. "He that will not work, neither let him eat." Be ashamed only of sin, and Christ will not be ashamed of you. Amen.

VII.

Sins of the Lips.

"For he that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile."—1 PET. iii. 10.



DON'T think there are any—I am sure there are not many of my readers—who do not love life. I have heard people saying, I wish I were dead ; but it is generally when they have done some very bad thing, and do not know how to bear up against its consequences ; or the feeling springs up when they are very miserable, and goes away in a very little while. There is an old fable that very well illustrates this. The story is, that a man had a very heavy burden to carry, and he cried out, "Oh, I wish I were dead ! I wish Death would come to me at once !" Well, the story says, Death did come to him, and said, "I heard you calling for me, and now I have come ; what do you want with me ?" "Oh," said the man trembling, lest Death should take him

away, "help me on with my burden, and leave me!" That is the way often with people who cry for death; they shrink from it when it comes, for it is natural for them and for us all to *love life*; and as all of us love life, so all of us wish to see *good days*—that is just an expression for enjoying life, having happy days. Everybody wishes to see good days; but boys and girls, like men and women, seek for happiness in different ways, and follow very different paths in search of those good days they all desire to see.

One boy thinks, "I would be happy if I had plenty of amusement and money; no work and no lessons to learn; that would be to see good days." Some girl thinks, "I would be happy if I were always to keep well, and have fine dresses, and go to nice parties, and see different places; that would be to see good days." Others think, "We would be happy if we had nice books to read, and nice companions to walk with." But these boys and girls forget that to have good days we must not only enjoy one or two days, but *a whole life*, and I fear their plans would not do for that.

It is with good days morally, as it is with good days materially. When it comes on to rain, people say, "Oh, what a bother the rain is ; it is such a *bad* day ; I can't get out ; I wish the rain would stop." But the farmer, perhaps at the very same time, is saying, "What a *good* day this is for the country ; I hope we shall have rain a good while yet." It might be very pleasant, all spring and summer, to have nothing but sunshine ; but what would we do when harvest came, if there had been no "showers to usher in the spring, and cheer the thirsty ground ?" So it may be very pleasant for us in the spring-time of youth, and the summer of man and womanhood, only to have sunshine and enjoyment in the way we wish, but it would not be profitable. Without the storm and rain, which for the time are not pleasant, *the harvest of life would be a failure*, the graces of faith would not bloom, the fruits of holiness would not ripen.

To see good days then, to be happy to *the very end* of life, is not the same as to enjoy ourselves to-day, and never to think of to-morrow. Many a time when a Sabbath

scholar is ill, his friends may say, "What a pity this is; it is a *bad* time for him, poor fellow." But, perhaps his Sabbath teacher or minister on the earth, perhaps angels in heaven, are saying, "This is a *good* time for him. He is thinking of God, and Christ, and heaven. He is reading the Bible; he is praying. He will see good days yet. He will be all the happier because of this illness. He will be able to say, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.'" To see good days, then, is to enjoy *true peace and happiness* all our life long, *even unto death*. And God, in His word and by His servants, tells us how this is to be obtained. It is by being and doing good, by believing God in Christ, and obeying Him, and following Him, and seeking to be like Him. At the beginning of the year, people wish one another a good new year. Many of them mean a year of health, and of wealth, and of friends, and of life. But God's people, true Christians, mean by it, a year of goodness, and they know that if we are good, then—come pleasure or pain, wealth or poverty, life or death—all will be well, and we shall see good days.

Now, I hope you believe God, and that you are satisfied that what the Bible says is true. If so, one way of getting happiness even on earth is to avoid all "sins of the lips." "For," says the apostle Peter in my text, "he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile."

In this sermon, then, I am first to set before you some sins of the lips, which you and I need to avoid. I shall then tell you how we shall be able to avoid them, so that we may enjoy life and see good days; and I hope you will be very attentive to what I have to say.

I. The first sin of the lips to which I shall refer, is the sin of *lying*. *Lying is deceiving others by leading them to believe something which is false.*

A person may be a liar without speaking at all. A shrug of the shoulders, a movement of the hand, a look, may convey to others the falsehood. But, generally, the lie is a sin of the lips. It may be entire invention, without any foundation at all, or it may

be an exaggeration without any proper foundation, with a *little truth* in it, and a *great deal of falsehood*. Such a lie has just a little point of truth to support a large fabric ; just as if a church with a steeple were turned upside down, and were to rest its whole weight on the point of the steeple. I daresay some of you have heard the story of the three black crows, which is an example of this system of exaggeration which many people indulge in. They can never tell a thing exactly as it happened. They always colour a little, so that you cannot have confidence in what they say.

The story of the three black crows was this : A man had said that a person who was very ill had vomited *three black crows*, and he gave his authority. The woman said she did not say there were three, but that there were two black crows vomited. She was sure of that, and she gave her authority. And at last they went to the sick man's wife, and she told them he had vomited some stuff *as black as a crow*, and that was the foundation of the whole story. Now I need not tell you it is very sinful thus to deceive others. God

is a God of truth, and he is much displeased with the words of lying lips. It will not do to say, "Others tell lies too," or, "Our master expects us to tell the customers what is false, to make them buy the things," or, "Our mother would be angry if she knew the truth, and so, for fear of being punished, we had to tell a lie," or, "It pleased our friends and did nobody any harm." All these excuses are of no avail before God. Lying is a *great sin*, and if it is persisted in, it will be visited with a *great punishment*. Remember the case of Ananias and Sapphira. And, after death, the Bible says, "All liars shall have their portion in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone." Whatever you lose or suffer for telling the truth, you will be gainers in the end. And, even in this world, who can trust a liar? Who can respect a liar? Wherefore, he that will love life and see good days, even on the earth, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.

You all know, I daresay, the story of Washington destroying the cherry-tree with his axe, and how his father said, when his son told him it was he who had done it, "Come

to my arms, my noble boy ; the pearl of truth is more precious in my eyes than a whole orchard of cherry-trees, though their blossoms were silver and their fruits were gold." After Sir Robert Peel's death, the great Duke of Wellington said in the House of Lords, "I was long connected with Sir Robert Peel in public life, and I had long the honour to enjoy his private friendship. In the whole course of my communication with him, *I never knew an instance* in which he did not show the *strongest attachment to truth*, and I never saw, in the whole course of my life, the smallest reason for suspecting that he ever stated anything which he did not firmly believe to be the fact." You see, then, that it brings us good and honour, even here, to avoid every sin of the lips.

Now, if a boy begins to lie, and learns to tell falsehoods, it will be very difficult to give up the habit. There was a famous Greek flute player, who used to teach pupils. But he always charged double fees when the pupil had been badly taught, because it was so much harder to *unlearn* what was *wrong*, than simply to *learn* what was *right*. And

yet, I am afraid there are scholars at our Sabbath schools who do not think it a great sin to tell a lie, if they can make anything by it. Shall I give you an instance? Well, I went one Sabbath to a very young class of poor children in a parish school, to hear them say their lessons. There was a little boy called Johnie in the class. One day before, I had asked him whether he would take a *lozenge* or a threepenny bit. The lozenge was too much for him—a present pleasure more than an after advantage. His teacher that Sabbath thought I should give him the threepenny, as he had said his lessons very well. I had not one, and I gave him sixpence, and asked him to bring back the threepence next Sabbath. Then I thought the temptation to keep the money would be too strong for him if I left it with him all the week. So I told one of the girls of the school—she lived beside him—to come over with him to my house next day, and give up the threepence. About nine o'clock on Monday evening, poor Johnie came with his mother, looking very much like a culprit. His older brother and he had spent all the sixpence on sweetmeats,

and never said a word about it. They thought to get off, for their father was in the Infirmary, their mother was out all day, and they thought I would never remember about it or ask it back. But on Monday afternoon, when the girl went to bring Johnie over with his threepence, then out came *the truth*. The bad boys kept out of the way, and did not come home till nine o'clock at night. However, the mother brought him over, that I might know what he had done. Well, what I was more vexed for than anything was, after he came over, he began to tell me lies about the money. No doubt his older brother was worse than he was, and took the sixpence from him. But they both shared the spoil, and then they both wished to throw all the blame off themselves. It was this little circumstance which led me to write this sermon about sins of the lips, and to choose for my text this verse, which I hope you will all take heed to: "He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that he speak no guile."

II. The next sin of the lips which I shall mention, is that of *swearing*.

What is swearing? Uttering profane language, language we know to be wrong, without any use or meaning, without getting any good by it. The liar expects to make something by his lie, but the swearer defies God and serves the devil for nothing. And yet, how often have I heard boys and girls, when playing together, swearing terrible oaths, and often, if you reprove them, the moment you go, they cry out—so that you may hear them—worse words than they had said before. Avoid such language and such companions. Do not use words of that kind at all. *Minced* oaths will lead to *unminced* oaths. And, remember who has said, “Swear not at all,” and “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”

Some are dumb. You can speak. What a bad use of that great gift of God—the power of speech—it is to swear. Indeed, the wonder is that God does not take away the power of speaking altogether from boys and girls, and from men and women, who thus speak blasphemy and profanity with their lips. Yet sometimes he does seem to show men that there is a God who hears and punishes profanity. An

old member of my Church once told me he knew two men who were coming into town, from a village near Edinburgh. A thunder storm came on. One of them was swearing and cursing God for sending such rain while they could get no shelter. They at last got under a tree. A very vivid flash of lightning came, and the bold bad swearer said, "Ah, almighty God! you've missed your mark just now; perhaps you may do better next time." In a moment a flash of lightning laid him dead beneath the tree. His companion, who told my friend the story, was terribly impressed by it, and ever after was a changed man.

III. Another sin of the lips is *filthy language*. But surely, I do not need to warn you against the use of *gross*, obscene, and filthy words. I am sure you shrink from hearing them spoken, and seeing them written. Shun boys and girls who indulge in such shameless language. They have a more loathsome disease than the small-pox, and you will be almost sure to catch the filthy infection if you keep their company. And bad words lead on

to bad actions, and God will punish you sorely for such conduct on the earth, and drive you away from him for ever on the judgment-day, saying, "Depart from me, ye cursed, ye that are filthy be filthy still, and feel that your *sin is utter misery.*"

IV. But I must dwell a little on another sin of the lips, namely, *rude, unkind, and angry language.*

Rudeness is bad anywhere, but especially on the part of the young. They especially should be gentle and submissive; not boisterous, and impertinent, and rude. Remember what a sore punishment came upon the young people who were so impertinent to Elisha. Speak gently to all. Even when you think your father and mother harsh, bear it and do not *speak back*. If you wish others to speak kindly to you and of you, do not speak unkindly to them or of them. There are some whose *mouth* is a very *sepulchre*. Every time they open it, there is a *corrupt* and foul effluvia, evil speaking, fault finding, scandal, slander, uncharitableness. You shudder when they mention the name of any of your friends.

You feel sure they are to say or insinuate something against them. Do not learn to speak *evil* of others, whether it is *false* or *true*. Half the things you hear against other people are false. Do not you repeat them lest you should be *circulating false coin*. Even if the things are true, the habit is a very bad one.

There is a story of a young Persian who continued his devotions while the other members of the family—all except the father—were asleep. “Father,” said the young man seeking praise, “*I only* watch and pray ; all my brothers and sisters are heavy with sleep.” The father’s answer was, “It is better that you, too, should sleep, than keep awake only to take note of the *faults of others*.” Learn you from that story. And remember that, though people may be *pleased* to hear you speaking against their enemies, they will *not love* you. They know you will equally speak against them or their friends if you take an ill will at them.

Sometimes this unkind manner of speaking rises into passionate violence and angry rage. Oh, what a sad sight it is to see a boy or girl raging, and wrathful, speaking words of vio-

lence and passion. It will not do to say, "He had no business to provoke me." Their doing evil does not excuse us. Nor, "It is soon over." So is the fire; but it may have destroyed while it lasted much property and life. A girl, then a Sabbath scholar, wanted to light a fire in the afternoon for her mother in case she would be wet and cold when she came home. Her dress caught fire, and in a very little time she was burned so awfully that she died in the Infirmary soon afterwards. Now anger is an outburst like that fire, soon over, but doing in a few minutes what can never be undone; destroying friendship, hopes, character, causing *sores and wounds never to be healed*. The storm is soon over, but what evil is done by it! So when boys and girls storm and rage, they excite evil passions in other hearts. They form passionate habits in themselves. Think how much harm has been done to religion by the violent language and the strifes and quarrels of Christians, and ministers, and different sects. Once it brought unbelievers to the Church of Christ because they were obliged to say, "Behold these Christians, how they *love* one another!" Alas! how often now

the careless are kept from the church, because they can say, "Behold these Christians, how they *hate* one another!"

A minister once told me that the most ignorant man he ever met was a collier. He began to speak to him of Jesus Christ. But he would not listen. "Don't speak of him," he said, "I have heard of him before. Once, at the mouth of a pit, two men began to speak about him, and they quarrelled and swore at one another so awfully that I was glad to get away." And so he was prejudiced against Jesus because his professing followers showed so little of the spirit and had learned so little of the language of their Master. I went once to see a man in prison on a charge of murder! I had known him before. I believe he was naturally quiet and inoffensive. But a woman, nearly drunk, one night came in and so provoked him with her tongue that he kicked her down stairs and killed her. Do not, then, give way to violent language. It will do evil to others and yourselves. They that rage and strive will never see good days.

There are many other sins of the lips, such as discontentment, peevishness, and fretful im-

patience. But I must not dwell longer on these. I shall, therefore, now consider how you may avoid these and all sins of the lips.

Perhaps sometimes when you have been ill the doctor has come and asked to see your *tongue*. If it was in a bad state, he did not paint it to give it a good colour, or put a plaster on it, as if doctoring *it* were all that was required. He knew that the *foulness of the tongue* arose from *something wrong within*, and he gave you a medicine to put your system to rights, knowing that then the tongue would be all right too.

Now Christ is the great all-wise Physician of the soul, and when you sin with your lips, when your tongue is full of deadly poison, he does not say to you, Take care of what you say, and whatever you *think* do not *speak* evil. He knows that out of the abundance of the *heart* the *mouth* speaks. It is the heart that is wrong. You need a pure, loving, gentle, truthful, good heart, and when the fountain is cleansed, the stream of language that flows from the lips will also be clean. Other teachers may say, "Don't speak evil of others, or they will speak evil of you. Don't

tell lies, for your sin will find you out." But besides telling you that, Jesus says, if you wish to keep from sinful words, you must keep from sinful thoughts and feelings. And if you believe him and obey him, he will create in you a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within you. If you believe that he gave himself up to the death for you, then, as he has loved you, you will love one another, and you will love the God who sent him to save you. And if you love a person you will not speak against him, you will read how Christ lived, and what he tells you to be and do. If you love him, you will try to please him and be like him, and he never was guilty of any sins of the lips. You will pray for his Spirit, and God will give it you more and more. And He will give you thoughts and feelings like Christ's, and then you will have no wish to lie, or swear, or say anything God disapproves. And that you may not fall into temptation you will not go with bad companions; you will set a watch upon your lips that you offend not with your tongue, your speech will be good and loving and heavenly. And thus you will enjoy life and see good days. Ay,

even on the earth you will be far happier and more respected than the children of sinful lips; and you will be useful to others, helping them also to refrain their tongues from evil, and speaking good words to them which will benefit both them and you in time and for eternity.

Do you not think your teachers who speak to you of God, and Christ, and salvation, and eternal life, will have more pleasant memories than those who teach their neighbours bad words and all manner of evil? And afterwards, when they are ill, the songs of Zion they have taught you will cheer them in the night of their affliction, and, casting their bread upon the waters, they will find it for themselves many days after. That is what one of my Sabbath-school teachers said to me about himself. He was dying of consumption, and for sixteen months he had been blind, quite blind. When he was about sixteen years of age, a boy struck his left eye with a ball, and weakened his eyesight. A few years ago he had a great deal of writing to do, and that made it worse. He tried change of air, but it would not do, and he came back quite blind

to die ! But he was very submissive and resigned. And as he lay on his bed not able to read, for the *days* were all *nights* to him, he remembered what he taught the scholars, and because teaching made him well acquainted with his Bible, he could repeat psalms and passages of Scripture which he would not otherwise have known. God's statutes were his songs in the night. And having cast his bread on the waters he found it after many days. How different would have been his feelings if he could only have remembered that he had made some girl a liar and some boy a swearer, and if he had been a teacher for Satan instead of for God ?

On such a deathbed, blind or not blind, we and all must lie. What then shall we wish our memories to be ? What then shall be our hopes ? Will sins of the heart, of the lips, of the life give us comfort then or hope then ? We know that for every idle word we must give an account, and that without holiness we cannot see the Lord. Oh, that we may all so live and die as to meet in the high and heavenly school—for there is learning even *there*—for ever, and dwell together with our

great Teacher and our heavenly Father, enjoying an eternal life and seeing good days that are never to end ! They that love *that life* and wish to see *those good and happy days*, let them, by faith in Christ and by the influences of his Spirit in their heart, refrain their tongues from evil, and their lips that they speak no guile. Amen.

VIII.

Children's Idols.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."—1 JOHN v. 21.



IS not this a curious text I've taken for this sermon, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols?" "Why," you may say, "one would think the minister fancied himself preaching in India. We know that there, there are a great many people that bow down before idols, and believe that pieces of wood and stone are gods." Yes, you are quite right about India. I was reading the other day some letters written about fifty years since by a person, a Dr. Buchanan, who, in the season especially devoted to the worship of Juggernaut, visited the place where the idol is kept. His temple has been standing more than eight hundred years. The idol is like a man, with large diamonds for eyes; with a black face, and a mouth foaming with blood. Well, he says,

he saw this idol put upon a large carriage, nine or ten times as high as the biggest man you ever saw. And then the men, women, and children (tens and hundreds of thousands were there altogether) began to draw the carriage along instead of horses. The wheels made deep marks in the ground as it went along. And here there was a man that lay down before it, and the wheels went over him and killed him on the spot. And then there was a woman, who in the same way lay down before the idol, thinking she was sure to get to heaven if she was crushed beneath that idol's carriage wheels. And he saw children there drawing the idol. And he tells about two little children sitting crying beside their dying mother, who had come to the city of the idol, and perished there from fatigue and want. And when they were asked where their home was, they said they had no home but where their mother was. And that mother was dying before her time because of her idolatry. Well might he have told such little ones how wrong such conduct was, and said to them, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Well, though these things are

now a little better than they were in India, they are still very bad. And I am sure you wish to keep the little children there, and everywhere, from idols.

This is the duty of every Sabbath scholar, as far as possible, to keep others from idolatry. Now when you hear it stated that there are still six hundred millions of people who worship idols, or two people out of every three that live, you must see what need there is to give money, and to send Bibles and missionaries, that the people who sit in darkness in presence of idols that cannot do them any good may arise and see that the Lord Jehovah is the only true and living God. Since the beginning of this century a great deal has been done for the heathen, and a great deal of good has been done among them. I daresay you have all read about the South Sea Islands, and the works of wonder God wrought there by men, some of whom are living still. I remember hearing from Mr. Ellis, one of the devoted band of missionaries who went there, a very interesting account of that work. He told me about Williams, his devoted friend, and God's devoted servant. You remember,

perhaps, what became of him. He was murdered going ashore at Erromanga to teach the people to turn from idols and to worship God. *And if all white men had been like Williams he would not have been murdered.* The man who killed him afterwards became a Christian, and said it was the doings, the misdoings of civilized Christian men before that had enraged the islanders against them, and made them resolve to destroy every one that landed on the shore. Well, but though Williams died, the others lived and laboured. Ellis made an alphabet for them, printed spelling books, wrote hymns, established Sabbath schools, and many by these means were brought to the knowledge and love of the truth as it is in Jesus. One story he told me I was much struck with, perhaps, because of the singularity of the meeting between him and one of these idolaters. Mr. Ellis was coming home from Madagascar, where a terrible persecution against Christians had been stopped by the heir-apparent saying, when the council had resolved to put the first man who professed the Christian religion to death, "I believe in Jesus; I am ready to die; if you are to

murder Christians, *begin with me.*" They dared not do that ; and so, though still Christians there were persecuted, they were not put to death. Well, Mr. Ellis was sailing home, and there was a terrible storm. One wreck had taken place not far from them, and only two of the crew had escaped. All night they had been on a raft ; and when they got them on board they were almost insensible. By-and-by Mr. Ellis went to the place where one of them (whom he suspected to be a South Sea islander) was lying. He began to converse with him. Then at once he began to repeat in his own language a hymn. As far as I remember it answered very much to our beautiful paraphrase,—

" Come, let us to the Lord our God,
With contrite hearts return ;
Our God is gracious, nor will leave
The desolate to mourn.
His voice commands the tempest forth,
And stills the stormy wave ;
But though his arm is strong to smite,
'Tis also strong to save."

The man at first looked wildly up, then rose and put back his hair, and gazed hard at him. Then his eyes filled with tears, and he went on to repeat, along with Mr. Ellis, the hymn to the end. How he embraced and blessed him

when he knew that it was *he who had written that hymn*. How he thanked God, not only for life, but this blessed meeting! He had been at a Sabbath school. He had learned of Jesus and the true God there. He had left off worshipping of idols since then. And all that night, with but a plank between him and death, he was able to commit himself to the Christian's God. Even you, by praying and by giving, can help these poor idolaters thus to turn to God.

But while it is very right that even Sabbath scholars should try to keep people in India and elsewhere away from idols, I want to ask if you do not think there are people *in this country* that have *idols*? "No;" you say, "we cannot believe that." There was a time, indeed, when the people in Britain had idols; and the very days of the week show us what idols they worshipped. There was Saturday, or Saturn's day; Sunday, or the day to worship the sun; Monday, or the moon-day; and so on all through the week. But now the people of this country worship no sun but the Sun of Righteousness, and no star but the Star of Bethlehem. And yet if that be true, what

is the use of my addressing these words to you, "Little children, *keep yourselves from idols.*"

To let you understand this, I must first explain to you what is meant by an idol. It is not merely an image to be worshipped. Any person, or anything that comes between you and God, that takes away your time, and thoughts, and affections from God's service, is an idol. Do you see now how people, even children in this country, need to keep themselves from idols? *You may be idols.* Your father or mother may love you more than God. Many a day they may think but little about God. They may never for a whole week together come near Him to speak to Him, or read His word, and hear Him speaking to them; and yet they are often thinking every day of you, and would think it a weary week if they could never speak to you, or hear you speak to them.

Money is the idol of many. Their covetousness is idolatry. Their own and other people's gold is worshipped as much as if it were made into a golden calf for them to bow before. They spend their time for it; their thoughts for it. They sacrifice their energies and their hearts' affections for it. They cannot part with it, either

for education or religion ; either for the temporal or spiritual welfare of their fellow-men.

Drinking is the idol of many. They will do anything and give anything to get it. How much they spend for it ! How little for any good object ! *Fame*, and *pleasure*, and *power* may be men's idols. But I need not go over them all. Everything that people take the greatest pleasure in, and love best, *if it keeps them from what is good*, is an idol to be kept from. I have heard of a lady who once said to a good man who was pressing her to be a Christian, " Well, I think I could make a profession of religion if I had not to give up cards." " Do you love them so much ?" he asked. " Yes," she said ; " they are my greatest delight." " Then," said he, " they are your god, and to them you must look for your salvation." From these, and all such idols, little children, keep yourselves.

I would not indeed have you to suppose that God tantalizes you by putting good things near you, which you are not to think of or to touch. He does not say to your parents, you must not love your children. He does not say to any man, you are not to care whether

you have or have not money to pay your debts, to get daily bread for yourself or your family, or to give a little to your father and your mother when they cannot help themselves. No ! He bids us thank Him for these and all His gifts every day. He bids us covet earnestly the best gifts. But when a gift, instead of drawing us nearer to the Giver, keep us or draws us away from Him, then *the gift becomes a god*—an idol—a curse. Money is God's gift to us. But if we refuse to do good with it, if we are proud because we have it, if we think *we* can do without praying as *some* need to do, "Give me this day my daily bread," *then* it becomes a great evil, though it was meant for good. The flowers and the trees of Eden were very beautiful and very good. Yet even among them Adam and Eve hid themselves from God. The bounties, and blessings, and good things of life are numerous and great. But often we content ourselves with these as our only portion, and even make of them a screen and covering to keep us from the sight and side of God. Is it not very bad that we should make gods and idols of the very gifts of God ?

I daresay John did not mean in this verse to bid *only very young* persons keep from idols. The words, "little children," may mean grown-up persons who had only lately become Christians. It is an endearing term for babes in Christ. But that he had persons quite young—just persons like you, my Sabbath scholars—in view in speaking thus, you may see from chapter second, verse 13, where he divides those he writes to into three classes,—fathers, young men, and little children. Well, you see, in saying, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," he includes even Sabbath scholars. Many of them have idols. All who wish to be God's dear children must keep away from them. Let us see what some idols of children are.

Some children worship *themselves*. They think everybody should do everything for them; they should never be asked to do anything for anybody; everybody should keep from saying or doing anything harsh to them, but *they* should do what *they like* to others; God should give them everything they wish, but they never think of giving up their own wills to God. They are self-willed, worshipping themselves, and

not serving God. Little children, keep from *yourselves as idols*. Some children make their *belly* their *idol*. They are constantly thinking about eating. If they get any money, they are sure to spend it upon sweetmeats; and while they would never repent having spent a sixpence of their pocket-money in that way, they would perhaps grumble a whole day if they had to give a sixpence of their pocket-money for doing good to children at home or abroad. *Don't you make your belly your god*. It is a low kind of pleasure, and it does not last; whereas, if you give twopence or a penny even to a poor creature, or sixpence to the ignorant heathen children, it may do them real good, and you are at the same time acting like Christ, who pleased not himself. Seek ye rather *the bread of life*. Try to have as much pleasure in the church or in the school as any boy or girl can feel in eating the finest sweetmeats, and while others hurt themselves by eating too much of their dainties, you will get the greater benefit the more you take of the bread of life.

There are some children whose god is their

belly ; there are others who *carry their idols on their back*. *Dress* is their god. When they go to the church or the school, they are always thinking of their clothes,—looking at others to see if theirs are as good ; wishing others to admire their finery ; quite pleased if others are envious, and vexed if they are not so much looked at and praised as their neighbours and school companions are. They would far rather be spoken about for having a fine new dress than for having a good, pure heart. They think more of the adornment of the body than of the adornment of the soul. Let it not be so with your adorning. “Let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel ; but let it be the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is, in the sight of God, of great price.”

Then again, *play* is often an idol. You are so anxious to get to it that you hurry over your prayers, or you are so long at it that you are tired and sleepy when you say them at night. You go to play when you should be doing something your parents have told you to do. Some boys and girls even play on Sabbaths,

and when they ought to be at the school or the church.

Evil passions may be your idols. Beware of them. They often demand sacrifices of blood. Cain worshipped them, and they goaded him on till he sacrificed his brother to please them.

Learning may be your idol. You may love your classes and your books, and have no room in your heart for God. In short, whatever keeps you from doing what you ought to do—whatever makes you tell lies, and disobey your parents, and keep from giving anything for what is good—whatever keeps you from your Bible and your prayers, and makes you always think of *it* rather than of God and good—that is an idol. And, little children, you must keep yourselves from idols.

Do not think, then, that an idol must be a great, big, ugly monster, and can only be seen in India. There are pretty-looking idols that may lead you away from what is good. There are little idols that fill up little children's whole hearts, so that there is little room for God. Thus, *any plaything* may be your idol. You can hardly keep from it on

Sabbath even. *It is what God should be*—in all your thoughts. A *doll* may be your idol ; caring for it, dressing it, playing with it, may take up all your attention. Or you may never think of God, who is doing so much for you, while that doll, which can do nothing for you, but for which you must do everything, is hardly ever out of your thoughts.

A number of years ago, there was a little girl at the church one Sabbath, when the minister was preaching to the young, as I am preaching to you. And the minister took this text—"Little children, keep yourselves from idols ;" and he told them what I have been telling you,—that many a little girl there made an idol of her doll—that it came between them and their duties and their prayers, and took up all their thoughts—and that God was very angry with such persons, and was much displeased with the sin of having any other god. Well, she felt that she was a young idolater. She had got such a nice doll ! Oh, she was so fond of it, and it looked so nice ! *She felt* that she was always thinking about it—Sabbath and Saturday, night and day. Perhaps she had been thinking about it in the middle

of the sermon, just when the minister began to speak about the doll. And she had been very well brought up ; so when she saw what was wrong, she was determined not to have an idol any more. And she went home, and looked at her dear little doll, and then at the fire, and then, I daresay, the tears came into her eyes ; but down it went into the fire, and the idol was destroyed. Perhaps grown-up people may smile at what she did, but *no one can laugh at the motive*. She believed she had been doing wrong, and she resolved to do so no more. I wonder if any of you are like her with your dolls, and whether you would have the courage to do as she did to keep herself from idols ; for if you cannot keep from idolizing even your playthings, put them away. Your idols must be destroyed, or they will destroy you. While, therefore, God always desires you to be happy, while it is good for you to play, and while you should be thankful you have dolls to amuse you, and companions to play with, and good clothes to wear, do not let any of these things keep you from thinking of God, and seeking to be good, and loving, and like Him. Rather the more you have,

remember that the more you have to thank Him for, and the more will be expected from you. Do not, then, give all your thoughts, and time, and love to things that cannot help you. To make an idol of a plaything! What is that but to act like a poor heathen idolater, who first *makes the god he worships*, and is then as much devoted to its service *as if it made him*? You know better; and to whom much is given, of them the more shall be required. Let this, then, be your prayer daily to God :—

“The dearest idol I have known,
Whate’er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from its throne,
And worship *only Thee*.”

Now that I have told you what an idol is, and what some idols of children are, I want to tell you, before I conclude, how you are to keep from idols.

The Bible says, “It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” And if grown-up men and women cannot of themselves always keep in the narrow way, but are often wandering to the right hand or the left, into some field of sin, how can children always walk aright? For a while, indeed, parents and friends may keep you so far out of harm’s

way ; but many of you are already getting beyond *their* responsibility. The Jews used to bring their sons at thirteen years of age to the church, and there declare that they would be no longer chargeable for the evil their children might commit. Well, many of you are beyond that age ; and even in the case of you who are under it, you often do things against the wishes of your parents, or serve idols they know nothing about.

Now, tell me, do you think they would be pleased to hear you saying these bad words that some of you sometimes say at school ? They are not responsible for them. *You do not hear them at home ;* you have got them by going with bad companions, who are serving idols and not God. There is some big boy you idolize. You think it an honour to be near him. He swears, or says rude words, and you get accustomed to them. *Do not go with such bad persons any more.* There was a good painter that lived nearly two hundred years ago, and he would never look at a bad picture, because he said he was always sure to copy, unintentionally, something from it. So will you borrow uninten-

tionally from these bad associates something more easily got than given up. Well, as your parents cannot always be beside you, to keep you from bad people and from idols, and as children are sure, if they trust to themselves, to fall into sin, I beg of you to *give yourselves to God, and he will enable you to keep yourselves from idols*. In the morning, ask him to keep you, and he will preserve you from all ill by day. When the day is done, do not only say, as so many little children,—

"This night, when I lie down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take;"—

but *think what you are saying*; and God, who never sleeps, will keep you, even in your dreams through the night, from evil thoughts. And thus will you be guarding helpless sleep with powerful prayer. He will keep Satan and evil spirits from putting bad thoughts into your hearts. Do not think you are able without God to keep yourselves. Solomon was the wisest man, but when he forgot God he forgot himself, and actually built temples for the worshipping of idols.

But remember, while God keeps idols away

from you, keep yourselves away from idols. Do not merely *wish*, in prayer, to be kept from them, but strive, and work, and use means to keep and drive them away. Always have a sword ready to strike them. A sword! you say. Yes; but not like what soldiers use. That may do against enemies or house-breakers; but idols, like death, can press through such weapons. Let it be *the sword of the Spirit*, which is the word of God. *Read God's word*, and you will see what you should do, and what you should not do; and believe what you read there, and then you will have the shield of faith to defend you against all the assaults of the flesh, of the world, and the devil. Love God, and you will not fall in love with idols. If you are very fond of any person, you will not like people that try to do all they can against him. If you love God, you will not love what He thinks wrong, and you will be so occupied with doing what He wishes, that you will not wish to do anything else. When a person is very much occupied with anything, he does not pay any attention to other things. A boy is busy reading or hearing an interesting

story, for example. Another boy wishes him away to play with him; he says, "Not just now; I want to hear about this." So when anybody wants you to go away from Jesus Christ, you will not; you will rather stay with him. To do that is the sure way of keeping yourselves from idols.

Observe what the text says: "*Keep yourselves from idols.*" *Do not begin* to serve them. It is far easier to keep from idols than to give them up afterwards. When people get used to what is wrong, they find it very difficult to leave it. God cries to them to come away, but they will not come; and at last He says, "They are joined to their idols; let them alone." Oh, then, be it yours to say, "What have we to do any more with idols?"

When you get an advice, you naturally consider who gives it you. Who, then, gives you this advice? His name was John. He was about the same age with Jesus. Naturally he was hot-tempered and high-spirited. But he had leant, as a disciple—for he was one of the twelve—on Jesus' bosom, and so caught and breathed a kindred spirit. When

he was an old man, the story goes that a cruel emperor put him into a large pot of boiling oil. He came out of it unhurt, and then he was banished to the island of Patmos, in the Ægean Sea. There he wrote the Book of the Revelation. But it was before this time that he wrote this letter, though he was an old man even then. He was fond of children, and loved to speak to them all as babes in Christ, needing to be guided by a Father's hand. When he was not able to preach, after he came back from his banishment, he used to say, "Little children, love one another." And when he was asked why he dwelt so much on that, he told them, Love was the fulfilling of the law ; and that his Master and theirs had said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you that ye love one another." Well, it was this good old man that said to the little children then, and says to you now, "Keep yourselves from idols."

And see *how anxious he is* about it. He keeps it to the last. The last part of a letter is often the most important part of it. It sums up shortly what the writer chiefly wishes.

This is John's great wish for children. And he adds a word to it which shows his earnestness. "Amen," he says. That means, "So let it be." I wish and pray, as if he had said, that they may so be kept. The Amen in our prayer, you see, is a very important word. It shows we are in earnest; and we should not sit down in church till the minister has said it, and we in our heart have said it too. Well, here John says "Amen" after this. He is anxious about that. He feels he has nothing more to add after that. He looks round and sees idols everywhere—living idols, and idols that have no life. He sees how ready children are to take up with anything rather than religion, and any one rather than God. And after he has said this he closes, that they may be more impressed. *It is his last advice.* If your fathers or mothers were dying, their last advice would be remembered. This, then, in this letter, is John's last advice to you. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols;" and I add, and I am sure your teachers, friends, and parents add to it a hearty and sincere "Amen."

But John did not say this of himself. He

was told what to say by God. This is all *the word of God*. And the same divine Master that had said on the earth, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," looking down from heaven, and seeing a great many little children not coming to him, but loving earthly things and earthly friends far better—making them their idols—told his servant John to speak to them again in love and sorrow, more than anger, saying, Little children, why are you not coming to Christ? "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." The same great God that is not ashamed to be called our Father, who bids us say to Him in prayer, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name," says to us, However little you children are, you are not too little to be Mine. Do not only worship Me by saying prayers, but worship Me in spirit and in truth. You must have no other gods before Me. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. God wishes us to be kept from *them*—from all kinds of *sin*—far more than to be kept from sorrow, even from death. Sorrow may make us better; death may bring

us nearer God, and make us happier than we are. But idols, they are bad ; and idol-worshipping can never make us good or happy, here or in eternity.

Now I shall give you an example of a little child that kept himself from idols. His father was a king—a bad man—and he was killed when his little son was only eight years old. But as he grew up he would have nothing to do with idols. He had ministers who told him about God, and he loved Him. And when he was sixteen years of age, and was allowed to do things himself, he tried to put away all idols from his country. But that required many years and great patience. The church had gone into disrepair, and in putting it to rights for God's worship, he found a copy of Genesis, and Exodus, and Leviticus, and Numbers, and Deuteronomy, all together—the Pentateuch, or Law of Moses, as it was called. When the sacred book was read to him (it is Josiah I am speaking of—good Josiah, kind of Judah), he was very sorry to find how little he and his subjects had been obeying God ; and after that, he was more determined than ever to keep himself and his

subjects from worshipping idols. Now, you cannot perhaps do so much as Josiah, but still you can do something. You can help others to keep from ill. You can show a good example, and now and then say a good word to help them on.


Parents, I know you would do a great deal to keep your children from *death*. And when you hear of any one saving a little child from destruction, you feel a thrill of pleasure and gratitude. The other day I heard of an engineer on a railway in Ireland, who saw three children playing on the line. Two got off and ran away, the other, a little child, was left upon it. On came the engine, and the engineer seeing that, though he had shut off the steam, the engine would not stop till after it had passed the place, leaped off, and ran with all his might, keeping up with the engine, and seizing the little child, he darted it off the rail, just as the wheel came down upon the very place. That was a noble work. Yours, Christian friends, is nobler still. You, if you are in earnest, are seeking to *save these children's souls*. The engine of sin is rolling on. Their death is sure, if they are not

carried from destruction to Christ. Try to help them, and Christ will give you strength and swiftness, so that you will outstrip the powers of evil, and cheat destruction, and redeem immortal souls from death and hell. Amen.

IX.

The Lord's Prayer.

"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."—MATT. vi. 9–14.

 DID you ever hear God speaking? He has often spoken, even with a human voice. You remember how He called to Samuel after he was in his little bed. Samuel several times went to Eli, thinking it was he who called him. But Eli told him it was God; and when God called to him again he answered, and was told things which were soon to come to pass. But though God does not now speak thus with human voice, he does speak still. He speaks *by his works*. "They have no speech nor language. Their voice is not heard. Yet their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of

the world." The thunder is the voice of the Almighty. The leaves of trees, the running brooks, the stones of the mountains, the wild waves of the sea,—all, in different tongues and with different words, speak to us *from* God, and *of* Him. The sun, and moon, and stars of heaven are for ever singing as they shine, "The hand that made us is divine."

God is always speaking thus. But do you ever hear Him speaking *specially to you*? When you were going to do something wrong, have you never heard a still, small voice saying, "Better not—*it is wrong*?" When you have done something bad, have you not heard a distinct voice coming up from your soul and conscience, saying, "You have sinned, you have sinned?" When in church, or at the Sabbath school, you have heard of some sin committed, of some duty neglected, of some warning, or promise, or blessing,—have you not heard a voice saying, "*That is for you*?" This is *God speaking to you*. Whether by your conscience or His Spirit, His word is used as the means of grace, and He makes you listen to it by the working of His Spirit in you, and the stirring up of your own. For, remember

God speaks to many who will not hearken. Just as a boy at night is drowsy, and does not hear the clock strike ; just as a person who falls asleep in church cannot know what the minister says ; so there are boys and girls who read or hear the Scripture, or the sermon, or the lesson of the school, while their souls are sleeping ; and God's Spirit, having been often grieved, does not waken them, because they do not wish or ask it ! These children do not hear God, though He is speaking to them ; and so His message *does them no good*.

I have said that God is often speaking to you. Now I say that *you should often speak to God*. You can do so. How ? *By prayer*.

Though you cannot see God, He can see you and hear you. He wishes you as well as grown-up people thus to speak to Him. Even very little children can cry for help, and they soon learn to speak to their fathers and mothers. So must you very early cry to God, and speak to Him in prayer. And what are you to say to God ? You can tell Him what you think of all His goodness to you, how much you love Him, and wish to be like

Christ, His beloved Son ; how thankful you are for all your friends and blessings ; how sorry you are for your wrong-doing and faults ; how much you need His help, and care, and pardon, and grace ; and how, believing in Christ, you can trust Him for all you need for life and death, for time and for eternity. And this speaking to God must go on, not merely when other people hear you, but when you are alone. You need not be silent at night, for God never slumbers. You need not wait for any day or hour, for God's ear is never heavy that he cannot hear. You need not even move your lips at all. God knows the language of the heart, and can interpret the lisplings and the groanings of the spirit.

But there are some people who say, "What is the use of thus speaking to God in prayer ? He knows all we have done, and all we can say. He knows what is to happen, and our speaking will not change His plans." It is a strange idea this of the object of prayer. As if God were hard and stern and we wanted to soften Him by our much speaking, and make Him kinder to us than He is. Or as if we wanted to enlighten Him by telling Him some-

thing He did not know. These people do not consider that prayer is not meant to change God into a happier, or wiser, or better being than He is; but *to make us happier, and wiser, and better than we are.* To express our earnest wishes before God and others, stirs us and others up to goodness. And if our requests are for things agreeable to God, then as these things come to pass, we see the goodness and adore the power and wisdom of Him who doeth according to His will among the inhabitants of the earth, doing all things wisely, and making all things work together for good to them that love Him.

Those people that do not believe in prayer, surely *do not believe in Christ.* Christ prayed though he knew all that was to be, though he knew God's purposes and character, and unchangeable perfections. We shall not be far wrong in following his example. Well, Christ sometimes spent *whole nights* in prayer to God. Think of that. A whole night *in prayer.* A whole night you may have lain on your bed in pain, and without sleep. Nearly a whole night you may have sat up reading some interesting book, or enjoying

some delightful party. But a whole night—a whole hour for prayer—ah, how rare is that! Yet, if you wish to be acknowledged as Christ's followers, you must thus speak to his Father. He has taught us *how*. "After this manner," he said to his disciples, "ye shall pray. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is done in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

This is called the Lord's Prayer, because *he* taught it. And how many of his disciples in every age have learned it. Under what different circumstances has it been repeated! How many has it cheered, and comforted, and helped! King and cottar, peer and peasant, saint and sinner, prodigals long unused to pray, and pharisees saying prayers for years and never praying once; children scarcely out of their cradle, and aged men and women tottering forward to their grave, have read this prayer, and learned it, and repeated it before

the throne of God. You yourselves have learned it in your infancy, and lisped it in your childhood. Many of you repeat it when you rise in the morning, and when you go to bed at night. But you do not on that account pray to God. You may *say your prayers to your mother*, yet not pray to God. You may speak that your father may hear you, and not think of God at all. Sometimes the things we learn when we are very young, we say glibly and by rote, and never think of their meaning. How many children can say,

"The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;"

and yet, how few, while saying it, think of themselves as little lambs that need that Shepherd's care. How many can repeat the Ten Commandments, and the Creed, who never try to understand them. And so with the Lord's Prayer. I remember seeing the different ways in which it was written by the prisoners in an English prison. They could repeat the Lord's Prayer, they said. They were told to write it down. What nonsense they made of it. Most of them did not understand it at all, though they went through

a certain form of words which they called the Lord's Prayer. Take care it is not so with you.

Now if you look at the Lord's Prayer, you will see it has a preface, petitions, and a conclusion. But I am going to treat it in a simple way. I shall ask these two questions in connection with it. I. Whom are we to pray to? and II. What are we to pray for?

I. Whom are we to pray to? It is to God. "Our Father which art in heaven."

Some of you may have fathers who are dead, and you may hope that they have gone to heaven. But I need not tell you it is not to them that this Lord's Prayer is to be said. It is to be said *by all*, whether their parents are dead or living. And there is only one Being to whom all can say, "Our Father who art in heaven." And that one is God. You see Christ takes for granted that we are not to pray to idols; nor to sun, and moon, and stars; but to the only true and living God. But more than that. He tells us about God, and how we should think of Him and speak to Him. When we pray to Him we are to say, "Our Father."

You do not know so well as your grown-up friends how much your earthly fathers have done for you. And, perhaps, it will not be till you are fathers and mothers yourselves that you will value as you ought your parents' love and care. Yet even *you know* what a sweet sound *home* is, and most of you, I trust, know *how loving is your father's heart*. He has thought of you, and worked for you, and made sacrifices for your education and advancement. When you were in pain and sorrow, he sympathized with you. When you are happy, he is glad. When you do wrong, he feels it deeply. When you are sorry, he is ready to forgive you. "Father," is one of the earliest words that children say. And even before they learn the whole, they lisp a part.

Well, God is a real Father, and loves you with a true fatherly love. He would not ask you to call Him your father, unless He pitied and cared for you "like as a father pitieth his children." In your wants, and sorrows, and anxieties, and temptations, your heavenly Father sees you, and loves to bless you. Hitherto He has been working for your life and happiness. In your sin He is grieved;

by your repentance, the joy even of heaven is increased. And whenever you wish to speak to the great God, and are afraid, consider this one word, and come to Him with all holy confidence and humble boldness, as children to a father, who is ever able and willing to help you.

But before that word "Father," there is another little word "*Our*." If you are selfish and do not love your brothers and sisters, how can you go to God and begin this prayer? You are not to think of yourself, and pray for yourself, and imagine God only cares for you and your sect, and country, and church. You are not to say, "My Father," nor to think of "*Our*" as referring only to a few. *All unbrotherly feeling* must be put away before we can ever begin to say the Lord's Prayer. Then in love and confidence we can pray, "Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."

But something more is told us of the God we are to pray to. He is *in heaven*.

This does not mean that he is not also on the earth. He is everywhere. But it means that this Father is very different from an *earthly Father*. He is in heaven.

This difference is twofold. 1st, An earthly father dies; our heavenly Father ever lives. 2^d, An earthly father is in many respects weak, and ignorant, and erring; our heavenly Father is perfect in power, in wisdom, and in holy love.

1. We can speak to God, not only loving Him as our Father, but trusting in Him as our *ever-living* Father.

To earthly parents we may say, "Stay with us," but they cannot remain. To earthly kings we may say, "Live for ever," but they are sure to die. The earthly emperor who commanded his body to be embalmed, and his robes of royalty to be put on, and his sceptre to be placed in his hand, and his crown on his brow, could not thereby really preserve his life or his glory. But our heavenly Father never dies. *God's children can never be orphans.*

Some of you have known what it is to lose an earthly father, or mother, or both. It is very sad. The house, the chair, the picture, the clothes, *all* remind you of your loss. You feel as if you had no heart now to do anything when that dear voice is silent—that dear parent dead. I called lately for a young

lady, an only child. Her father had died several years before. Her mother had died suddenly a few days before I called. I sat on the sofa, and she began to tell me of her loss. But she could not go on. She held her hands before her face, and almost in a voice of pleading anguish, said, "Oh, please not there! Do not sit on that sofa. *It was there my mother died!*" "What is life without our father?" I have heard the weeping daughter cry in agony as she and other loved and loving ones were weeping round her father's bed of death. Such scenes are terrible. But if our heavenly Father could die—if God could thus be taken from us—what would life be then, if indeed there could be life at all?

Do you remember the story of the boy Casabianca, who was told by his father to remain on board ship, during a battle, till he sent orders for him to leave it:—

"The boy stood on the burning deck,
Whence all but he had fled;
The flames that lit the battle's wreck,
Shone round him—o'er the dead!
Yet beautiful and bright he stood,
As born to rule the storm;
A creature of heroic blood,
A proud though childlike form!

The flames rolled on—he would not go,
Without his father's word;
That father, faint in death below,
His voice no longer heard."

But the boy knew not that his father was dead. He had been ordered to remain till he had leave to go. And therefore sadly he cried aloud,—

" 'My father! must I stay?'
While o'er him fast, through sail and shroud,
The wreathing fires made way:
They wrapt the ship in splendour wild,
They caught the flag on high,
And streamed above the gallant child,
Like banners in the sky."

And then came the explosion,—

"There came a burst of thunder-sound;
The boy—Oh! where was he?
Ask of the winds that far around,
With fragments strewed the sea."

That young, faithful heart had ceased to beat. His father could not give him leave to go, for he himself was dead.

We also are told to remain at our post till God bids us away. But if He were to die— if we were to be left here, buffeted by Satan, and without a Father's care—what a life and what a world! But that is impossible. Our Father is God, and God is in heaven. Age brings no infirmities to Him. Centuries take not any of His strength away. His life never

draws nearer to death. He is from everlasting to everlasting God.

2. Again, this expression, "Our Father in heaven," implies not only that the God we pray to is ever-living, but that, unlike any earthly father, He is *perfect*—infinite in power, in wisdom, and in holy love.

However much an earthly father loves his child, he cannot always be beside him to help him; nay, he cannot always help him though he is beside him. He has not power to do everything; nor has he wisdom to guard against all dangers; to know what is to happen, to do everything for the best. And the best of earthly parents are imperfect, so that sometimes we may displease God to please them, and wander far from God by following in their steps. But God is almighty. He is all-seeing, all-knowing, everywhere. He is glorious in majesty, and perfect in holiness. He is our Father, but he is also in heaven; on the throne of the universe, high above all change, and ruling over all. He *can* help us, for he is *in heaven*. He *will* help us, for he is *our Father*, as well as the Father of saints and angels there.

II. Come now, and let us learn *what* to say and pray for, when we speak to God. This was the second thing to be considered.

When God's children come to their Father, there are two sets of wishes which Christ bids them cherish and express. The first class of wishes or petitions is in reference to the Father, and the second in reference to themselves.

1. In regard to the Father, these are their desires,—that His name may be hallowed, His kingdom come, and His will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Those who look upon prayer as being merely or chiefly an asking of good for ourselves from God, must be very much surprised at this Lord's Prayer. Nay, I think we are all inclined to wonder at it. We are told to go to God, telling Him what we wish. If I ask you what you wish most, what answer could you *honestly* give? Perhaps money, perhaps friends, perhaps health, perhaps pardon, perhaps to be sure to go to heaven. But you see God's children are not to wish for any of these things *first*. They are to *begin with God*,—to feel that all is right if He is loved, obeyed, and glorified; that all

is wrong if He is dishonoured and defied. It is thus the patriot's first wish is not for himself, but for his country; thus the parent at once risks life to save a child; thus God's child wishes above everything the advancement of his Father's honour, and kingdom, and cause. Let us see the different parts of this wish regarding God.

1. "Hallowed be thy name." This supposes that God's name is known. Where it is known let men honour and hallow it. The name is what we are known by; and when we hear some names we are delighted, while other names are loathed. The name of mother, how dear it is! The name of a friend we love,—the name of a child or a parent that is dead,—the name of some great man in Scotland's, or England's, or America's history,—what reverence and love we feel whenever it is thought of or mentioned! Even so we wish, if we breathe this prayer sincerely, that God's name may always waken reverence and love, that His character may everywhere be admired, and that He himself may be held in higher estimation than any being whatsoever. However *our* good name may suffer, though

other names may be forgotten, and other friends lightly esteemed, still, and above all, and for ever, "Hallowed be *Thy* name." Vainly did the Jews *imagine* they hallowed God's name by making the sacred name secret and ineffable. Vainly do Christians think they hallow God's name by bowing and signing when they hear it mentioned. Not only must we, to show ourselves sincere in this desire, avoid profanity and cursing, ourselves,—we must praise God, and magnify His name, and show the glory of His character, that others may open the doors of their hearts, and let the Light of the Sun shine in, that they may behold his glory.

2. The next part of this wish regarding God is, "Thy kingdom come." This refers especially to those lands where yet God's kingdom is not established; that everywhere His word may be known, and His laws obeyed, and His gospel believed; that His presence and power as Ruler may everywhere be felt and owned, and every kingdom of the earth be ruled in righteousness, and truth, and love, all being subjects of God. And we must do what in us lies to send forth God's light and truth,

if we are earnest in our wish that God's kingdom may come.

3. Then, if both these wishes are fulfilled,—if God's kingdom is universally established and if through all His dominions His name is hallowed,—the fulfilling of the third wish will soon follow as a necessary consequence: "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. It will be done *completely*; it will be done *universally*; it will be done *constantly*; it will be done *cheerfully*. Earth, like heaven will be full of the glory of God. It was for this Christ lived and died; for this Christ prayed, rather than for anything to himself "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. *Father, glorify thy name.*" So *that* must be our great desire, and we, like him must be willing for this to endure sacrifice and suffering; and we must pray, as he has taught us, first and chiefly, that our heavenly Father's name may be hallowed, His kingdom come, and His will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

Having thus breathed before our Father's presence our desires for His manifested glory

for the world's happiness, we are encouraged and required to ask good for ourselves. And what is it? There is one request for the body—*bread*. There are two prayers for the spiritual nature—*mercy* to pardon and *grace* to restrain and help. I wish I could dwell a little on each of these petitions; but each of them would need a sermon for itself. Only observe,—*all* are dependent every day on God, and every day they need to ask, and ought to ask, for *daily bread*. Again, the revengeful and unforgiving who pray to God, “Forgive us our debts *as we forgive our debtors*,” they are *not praying for mercy* to pardon, *but for judgment* and wrath. And again, *God never tempts any of you to sin*. Sometimes, in the way of duty, you have to come in contact with evil and evil doers; but remember God, and He will remember you. Then especially pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” and, in the midst of *temptations*, you will not be led *into temptation*, and, in spite of the flesh, and the world, and the devil, you will be delivered from evil.

“For,” it is added as a conclusion to the Lord’s Prayer, “Thine is the kingdom.” *Thou* hast

the right to reign. It is *Thy* kingdom, as a kingdom of truth, and righteousness, and love, that should come and be established on the earth, "and the power" to give us all temporal and spiritual blessings, "and the glory," which all should see and own, and which alone can lighten this sorrow-laden and sin-darkened world.

Let us breathe forth to all this prayer a sincere "Amen." So let it be.

Never weary of this divine prayer. Never repeat it without thinking what you say. It is beautiful in itself. Oh, is it not still more delightful because of all the associations you have with it? There are flowers lovely themselves, yet doubly dear, because they grew in childhood's garden, cheered the sick-room of a now departed brother or sister, or it may be grew, and still are growing, on a cherished grave. And which of us have not some childhood's memories, some sick-room associations, some death-bed interest, clustering round this prayer which so many living and dead ones have offered up to thee, "Our Father, which art in heaven?" Amen.

X.

Life on Earth.

"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."—JOHN xvii. 15.



MY text is a part of Christ's farewell prayer for his disciples, and tells us what he wished for those he was about to leave behind him in the world. I say the prayer tells us what he *wishes*, because he wished *everything he prayed for*.

You and I often say words of prayer without thinking what we are saying. We may say to God, "Thy kingdom come," and all the time we may be thinking of something else, and not be wishing heartily and earnestly the coming of God's kingdom. But it was different with Christ. He was always thinking of what he said, and this prayer of his to God was the sincere wish of his soul for his disciples, "I pray not that thou shouldest take

them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." There is another thing connected with this wish which well deserves to be attended to. It was not a selfish wish. You might suppose that when it was uttered he could have had no time to think of any but himself. Next day he was to die; and he knew it. But there was no selfishness in the bosom of Jesus. When he was in heaven he thought of us sinful and miserable beings on the earth. All through his life, nay, on the very cross, he was thinking of others and wishing their good. And so on the eve of his crucifixion he looks round on the followers from whom he is so soon to be parted, and he tells them not to grieve; "Let not your hearts be troubled." He looks up to his Father and their Father, to his God and theirs, and he thinks of them, and wishes good to them, and prays for them, saying, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

Then again, Jesus' wishes are *always the same*. We often wish one thing to-day, and another thing quite different to-morrow.

Christ's are the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. So, then, what he wished *then* for his disciples, he wishes for his disciples still. And who are his disciples? All of us who will follow and obey him. For what did he say to those very persons before he went to heaven? He said, "Go ye and make disciples or Christians of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Hither to this distant island of the Gentiles the followers of Jesus came. They found our forefathers miserable idolaters. They taught them Christian truth. And now Christ claims *you as his disciples*. In your very infancy your parents brought you by baptism to him. Then you got a Christian name. You have these Christian names still, all of you. Walk worthy, therefore, of the Christian name you bear, and remember that Christ, though now on the right hand of the throne on high, is thinking of you and wishing good to you, and praying unto God for you, saying still, "Holy Father,

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

Now, let us see what this prayer of Christ for all his disciples means. I think it implies three things.

I. He does not wish their lives to be shortened.

II. He wishes them to lead an active life.

III. He wishes them to be kept from evil.

I. Then I say Christ does not wish his disciples' *lives to be shortened*. He says to that God, in whom they live, and move, and have their being, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them *out of the world*."

The prayer is not that God would never take any of Jesus' followers out of the world. It is appointed unto all Christians and heathens to die, and Jesus does not pray that that should be altered. Why should he? He knows that beyond the grave there is a happier world than this; that *it* is the believer's *home*; that only *there*, all God's children feel their happiness complete. The wonder then is that Christ does not wish his friends at once with-

drawn from earth and raised to heaven. But here he tells us that is not his wish. "I pray not that thou shouldest take my disciples out of the world."

The meaning of this is that Christianity is not to interfere with the ordinary laws of providence regarding human life. The fact of a man being a Christian is not to shorten his life. In Christian countries, as well as in heathen lands, some are to die in infancy, some in youth, some in man and womanhood, and many are to live to a good old age. No doubt some may have to die for Christ before their time. The babes of Bethlehem did so, slain by the sword of the butcher Herod. Many of the apostles did so. But it was the *enemies* of God that thus took them out of the world. It was not God that changed the ordinary laws of providence to shorten their earthly life.

Now, I allow that at first you may be surprised at this; you may wonder that Christ does not wish to shorten the earthly lives of his disciples. He looks on children,—he says, "Of such is the kingdom of God." We believe that when death comes to them it is a mes-

senger to take the soul to heaven. Yet though we see the arms of a heavenly Father stretched out to receive those little ones whom death is taking from the arms of earthly parents, though we hear Christ saying, as they try to keep their loved ones to themselves and to the earth, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven;" though we know there are kinder friends waiting them on the eternal shore than they have had in the quiet haven of their infant home, than they will ever have upon the sea of life, we yet are told that Christ does not desire his people all to die in infancy or childhood. There is work for them to do, that they may have woven for themselves a yet more glorious crown. In this respect, then, his blessed religion does not interfere with the ordinary dealings of God's providence. And just as many heathen children live to maturity, so he says, "Let my children in Christendom also live. I pray not, O God, that thou shouldest take *them* out of the world."

Perhaps, at first, we might expect that after they have made in youth a solemn profession

of their faith, while all the Christian graces are bright and blooming, ere yet trials and temptations have come upon them, when heaven has been secured, Christ would wish his friends *withdrawn from the earth*. And no doubt he does thus sometimes come into his garden and pluck a budding or a blooming flower and put it in his bosom, and take it up to adorn some glorious mansion in his Father's house. But he makes no law to exempt the Christian flowers from earthly storms. The young believer is not always at once taken from earth, but must endure the tempests of temptation to the natural end of life. Jesus wishes not that the young disciple should be taken out of the world, but that he should be kept from the evil.

Or yet again, and especially, we might think that when the apostles, Christ's followers, were exposed to suffering and scorn, their Master would take them away from the power and presence of *his* enemies and *theirs*. We know, if we are God's children, that "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Paul

knew that if he were absent from the body, he would be present with the Lord; that for him to die was gain, and he had often a desire to depart and to be with Christ, feeling *that* was far better than to suffer on the earth. But though Paul wished to be in heaven, he did not wish *to leave the earth before God's time*; and only after he could say, "I have fought the fight; I have finished my course," did he also add, "I am ready to be offered." Though the soldier wishes to be home among his friends, he does not wish for that to leave the battle-field before the fight is done; and, therefore, though Christ tells us this is not our rest, he also tells us that as long as God preserves us here, we must remain doing duty—bearing trial, resisting temptation, advancing the cause of godliness, preparing for eternity; and then when we have done our work, the Lord will call us home.

While, therefore, it would have been good for many that they had died in infancy, just as it would have been for many had they never been born; while it is true of many, that the longer life with them the greater sin, and that the greater sin there

is, there will be all the heavier punishment ; while Christ's disciples have not here the joy they will have in another world, Christ still regards this life as a school in which his children all their life should learn ; a vineyard where they all their life must work—ay, and a furnace, in which through all their life they need to be refined ; and therefore he says, "Holy Father, I recognise the wisdom and the goodness of Thy providential plans ; I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world."

And if this is Christ's wish, and if his wishes are more or less carried out in every Christian country, we may expect to see his religion doing away with those practices which tend to shorten human life in other lands. And so it is. Among heathens, murders are common ; wars are perpetually waged ; filthy habits breed fevers or plagues, and so in many ways the life of man is shortened. ' Now Christ says to you and me, I do not wish you thus to shorten your own life or that of others ; "honour your father and your mother that your life may be long in the land ;" pray that you may be preserved from accident, distress, and death ; live temperately and purely, that

dissipation bring not on your body premature decay ; be mindful of cleanliness, that pestilence be not invited to your dwelling ; do not murder, that your own life and your brother's life be not taken away ; cherish not bad passions ; brood not over hateful thoughts ; let not a thought of suicide—whatever trials you may bear—be entertained within your breast. No doubt it seems a brave thing not to be afraid of death ; but suicide is cowardice ; it is a flight from time ; a retreat from the battle of life, because the fight is severe, and the enemy powerful ; and if we leave our post before our time, how dare we go into the presence of our King, and claim from Him the victor's crown ? Christ does not wish us thus—however disagreeable life's battles—to be deserters from our post ; God, when the proper time has come, will call us to Himself ; till then, Christ says, “ I ask Thee not to take them out of the world.”

There is only one thing more I wish to say on this topic ; you may hear people grumbling over their lot, as if there were nothing in the world to be thankful for ; thinking they do well to sigh for death as a messenger to release

them from a dreary dungeon, pretending not to think their life worth having or worth keeping. I say *pretending*, for often this is a mere pretence ; they who thus affect to despise life are not prepared for death when it does come. But if it is not pretence, it is *sin*. Be not you like-minded. As long as God spares you in health and strength, thank Him for His gifts, and “whatsoever your hands find to do, do it with your might.” When weakness and distress come upon you, think it not a sin to pray for your recovery ; pray as Jesus prayed,—“Father, if it be possible let this cup pass away from me : ” though also add like him, “Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” Use every means and medicine you can for the preserving of your life and health ; remember your body is God’s handiwork, and to be cared for ; it is His temple, and must not be allowed prematurely to fall to decay ; it is no part of Christianity to be indifferent about the body, or anxious for death, or heedless of health and life. Christ does not wish his people, and they therefore should not wish themselves, before God’s time to be taken out of the world.

II. I observe, in the second place, that Christ wishes his disciples to lead *an active life*. We may be quite *out of* the world, while we are *living in it*. We may bury ourselves alive, and have nothing to do with earthly pursuits, or relations, or duties, or enjoyments. Now Christ does not wish his followers thus to lead a life of seclusion or sloth. No doubt there is a sense in which the world is full of wickedness, and should be shunned; that is *man's world*; the world as sin has changed it, having unchristian pursuits and sinful pleasures, and a friendship which is enmity to God, inviting us to them and to ruin. But there are certain things which God meant from the beginning to be in the world; and this is a world which we must use, and Christianity is not meant to drive us out of *it*. There are different grades of society; different spheres of duty; different pursuits and pleasures, which God means us to think of, and to profit by, and with regard to which Christ says, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world."

In former ages, when the Church looked on everything in the world as only evil and polluting, what was done? Kings and queens

laid down their crowns and left their thrones for lives of seclusion. To enjoy an earthly happiness was looked upon as wrong. Priests thought it wrong to marry, men and women went into monasteries and convents, or shut themselves up in cells in which they could hardly move,—or put themselves on pillars and on pinnacles, to stand for half a lifetime there, as if the busy, moving world below were all unworthy of their presence, though Christ did not think it unworthy of his. Now, this is not what Christ requires. We may retire from the world now, and yet be no nearer God. Observe, I do not say we should never be alone. We must often commune in silence and in solitude with our own heart. What I say is, that God has provided a certain *world for us to use*, and *we must not leave it* because it is often *abused*; and a certain place for drawing out our energies and affections. And not to take advantage of this is to be guilty of sin. God has put certain things in this world in our power, and not to do them is to be guilty of sin. God has given us certain duties to perform, and we are sinning if we leave these duties un-

performed. We may say we are doing nobody any harm. But are we doing *good*—the good God *gave us to do*? We may be burying our talent in a napkin; but God does not approve of that. What would be the effect of all good monarchs leaving their thrones, but to fill these thrones with tyrants, and so to bring misery on nations? What would be the effect of Christian men refusing to be magistrates, or councillors, or bishops, or elders, or governors of public institutions, but to leave these places to be filled by those who would not act on Christian principles, or forward Christian objects? What would be the result of good men withdrawing from business, from social intercourse, from duties that are disagreeable, and require much self-denial and labour? Only to delay the advancement of Christ's cause,—only to prevent the world from being leavened in every part of it with Christian principles,—only to give up every part of God's world *but the sanctuary*, and every day of time *but the Sabbath*, to the flesh, the world, and the devil.

That will never do. It is wrong, undoubtedly, to rush into scenes of temptation,

in order to *see life* and to *know the world*. “Where ignorance is bliss, ’tis folly to be wise.” And how will you thus associate with evil doers without learning evil ways? “Can a man take fire into his hand, and not be burned? or pitch, and not be defiled?” But wherever duty calls us, let us go. Whatever duty bids us do, let us do it. Whatever relations God has sanctioned, let not man forbid. Whatever sphere in providence we fill, let us discharge its duties faithfully. Not looking on riches, or power, or rank, or influence, or health, or talents, as *evils* or *snares*, but as *good gifts*, to be used for God; as things of the world which, rightly used, will prepare us and others for everlasting habitations.

Now, then, remember Christ is not angry when he sees you entering on the world. He will be near you if you seek his presence, in work as well as in worship,—through the week, as well as on the Sabbath,—in all your intercourse with others, as well as in your intercourse with God. Religion is not to be crushed into a corner. You are to be God’s always—to show that you are His every

day. And though you will often sleep when you should watch, and stumble and fall as you go through the vale of life, still go on—not leaving the world, which is thus the scene of your trial, and sometimes of your defeat, but praying the more, and watching the more, for the time to come, that you may hereafter be kept from the evil.

III. This leads me to the third and most important part of Jesus' prayer for his disciples—that they may be kept pure and unspotted from the world—"I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest *keep them from the evil.*"

The evil here is *not natural evil*. No doubt Christianity keeps us from much natural evil. It relieves many sufferings. It draws attention to the arts of peace, and to the sciences which have to do with human life; and thus men may be led, as in the case of *vaccination*, for example, to discoveries that every year save tens of thousands from an early grave. But Christians suffer as well as others. Christ told his followers they would, many of them, have terrible evils to bear, and

by the flames of martyrdom be carried up in chariots of fire to heaven.

The evil here is *moral evil*. How sin was introduced into our world I need not tell you. Enough to say, it is *here—everywhere* in God's world. And verily we all need to keep from this evil, and from that evil one, who is the author of it. There are bargains to be made—there is business to be conducted. It is well. That world of business and bargaining is not necessarily wrong. But there are evils from which Christ wishes you to be kept. There will be friendships formed and social intercourse enjoyed. It is well. Christ smiled on friendship and on social pleasures. But beware of the evil. Beware of evil speaking, of flattery, of intemperance, of impiety, of prayerlessness, of impurity, of avarice, of ambition, of every form of sin. You may be poor. Christ does not allow you on that account to leave the world. But beware of the evil of discontentment, of envy, of dishonesty, to better your estate. You may be rich. *Wealth is not a sin*; but it has many temptations. Beware of pride, of ingratitude, of self-indulgence. You may be reviled and

ill-treated. You must not on that account forswear society, and retire altogether from the world. Go on unreviling, forgiving, blessing still. And *thus*, while *you are* you *will not be* of the world.

You will use it without abusing it. You will act in accordance with the wish of Christ that his followers, while living and acting their part upon the earth, should keep from evil. Whether or not you rise to eminence and wealth,—whether or not you are talented—you will be *loved of God*, and known *good*.

Do you see now the view which Christ in this verse gives of life and of the world? It is not a waiting-room, in which we are to wait impatiently till God is ready to receive us,—till a mansion in our Father's house on high has been prepared. It is a school, where we have to learn lessons needful for us to know, before we go into a higher school beyond the grave. It is a state of discipline, in which, amid trials and temptations, our character is to be formed. And heaven is our inheritance, the value and glory of which *must depend so far* upon the life of earth.

Good and evil are before us. We may choose either. God does not send death to prevent us from choosing the evil. Christ does not wish his disciples to be put beyond the possibility of being tempted. He sees evil before and beside them. His wish is not that all temptation to do wrong should be withdrawn, but that they may be enabled to abide the storm, and *keep from evil*.

It is as when a sailor goes from a quiet haven in a vessel. It is launched upon the sea. It is meant for storms. The sailor does not wish it always to be in the harbour, beyond the reach of the tempest, but to be built so as to endure the storm without suffering shipwreck. So your principles are formed in youth. You must be launched upon the sea of life. God wills it. Christ sees the storms of trial and temptation coming, yet he does not say, Put back to port,—leave at once that stormy sea of life. His voice is raised above the tempest, saying, “Father, I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil,”—making the winds and waves, the very storms of life, the means of draw-

ing them still nearer to the blessed shores of immortality. We have a battle of life to fight. What father sending his son to the war would wish him to shrink from the combat? "Go, my son," a father once said to his warrior-boy; "and come *with* your shield, or *on* it." With it as a conquering soldier, or on it, struck by death upon the battle-field, and stretched as a lifeless soldier there. So God tells us to contend against the powers and principalities of evil. If we cannot wholly conquer them on earth, let us die fighting against them, having in our grasp to the very last the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Christ wishes us to be safe, but not to be cowardly; to keep from evil, but not by leaving the world. Blessed is the man that thus endureth temptation. Thus we shall make our adversary our helper. We shall not only be *good* men, but good men *proved*; and our temptations to evil being overcome, will be the means of strengthening us against yet fiercer onsets in our future life. And how is this to be done? Observe we cannot keep ourselves from the evil. God has to keep us. You

must *pray*. You must *look to Christ*. You must *trust in God*. You must seek *His Spirit*. You must read *His word*. Then your Father will lead you, and you shall be kept. Christ will save you from evil here, and woe for ever. The Holy Spirit in you will be mightier than all the evil spirits that can be against you. And here or elsewhere, thus watching and praying, thus believing and acting, you will be kept by the power of God from evil and the evil one. There are many other things I meant to tell you. But I must have done. This only let me press upon you, *keep from evil*. That is better than repenting of it when it is done. Prevention is better than cure. Christ's name is called Jesus, "because he saves his people *from their sins*,"—not after they have sinned, though that he also does. Christ's wish is, that you may be kept from evil. Great changes do sometimes take place *at once* in man's character, as on man's condition; but far more become rich gradually than at once;—on man's moral, as on man's outward aspect, but seldom, in comparison with *gradual* change. It is *now* you are fixing your character. Now you are fixing

your condition for time and eternity. Wherefore, on your behalf, it is my earnest prayer, "not that you may be taken out of the world but that you may be kept from the evil."

XI.

Death.

A NEW YEAR'S SERMON.

"This year thou shalt die."—JER. xxviii. 16.



PERHAPS some of you have seen a picture like this. There is an old man with a scythe. He is cutting grass upon a field, and every time he draws the scythe along, a quantity of the grass is cut down, and left to wither on the ground. What do you think this picture means? Do you remember this verse, "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man is as the flower of grass." Well, that explains the picture. The grass means the people that are living in the world. The scythe means death. That old man is *Time*, that goes on year after year cutting everybody down just like grass, and leaving their bodies to rot in the grave. But then there's one

curious thing about this old man, "Father Time," as some people call him. He has gone on killing people for hundreds of years, ay, even for thousands of years. And though he is so old himself, he cuts people down as fast as ever. He does not totter *slowly* on, as you would suppose an *old man* would do. This year he is just as able to cut all flesh down like grass as when he first took the scythe into his hand. And he never takes a moment's rest. He is every hour making somebody ill, and causing somebody's death. Never a single day is Death idle ; and even at night, when we need to sleep, Death does not sleep. More people die through the night than through the day. At any rate, you would think that when this scythe of death, cutting people down upon the field of this world, had got to the end of the year, Father Time would take a rest for an hour or two, and that Death would not do anything on New Year's Day, but make it a holiday as most people do now. But suppose you had watched the clock on the last night of the year, you would have seen that it did not stop for five minutes. It went on, tick, tick, tick, all the same as ever. And if

you could have seen all that was happening in our world that night at twelve o'clock, you would have seen, just as the people were shouting that the new year was coming, you would have seen Death busy as ever, and cutting down some poor victim on the field of time. He never thinks of a holiday for himself, and never lets a single day pass, either at the beginning or the end or in the course of the year, without cutting some people down and leading them away through his dark valley.

Well, you may be quite sure it will be the same this year as it was last year. It is the same just now while you are reading as at any other time. People are always dying. And this year many people are dead already ; and this year many more will die. We cannot tell who the people are that have to die this year. And it is very well that God does not tell us. *But He knows.* And if I knew as well as He does I could point to this boy or that girl, to this teacher or to that parent, or, perhaps, I would need to point to myself, and bid you listen while God was saying to the one thus pointed out, "This year thou shalt die."

1. Now, one part of this text applies to

every one of us—the latter part, “*Thou shalt die.*” Do you remember where these words were spoken first? In the garden of Eden. To Adam when God told him not to eat of the forbidden fruit. “In the day thou eatest thereof, *thou shalt surely die.*” Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. And they did die. And Adam and Eve’s children still do what is bad, and they all die too. And you, my reader, you shall also die. It may be far away in America, or in Australia, or in India, as a soldier in a foreign land. It may be as a sailor on the deep. But Time with his scythe will follow you wherever you go, and some day or night, when perhaps you think not of it, he will cut you down. Or, perhaps, you may be at home among your friends when Death comes in and takes you from them. But whether you be alone or have your head supported on the pillow of your deathbed by some tender hand, whether the call be slow or sudden, whether you may be conscious of what is happening to you and around you then, or quite insensible of all that then takes place, Death will come in to you. God will not forget to send him, and you, and I, and all of

us shall die. My text says, "This year thou shalt die." I have two things to say about it.

I. This is true of *many young persons*, and *may be true of you*.

II. This is true of *all*, and *must be true of you*.

I. It is true of many young persons and may be true of you, that "This year thou shalt die."

Do you know about these words, "This year thou shalt die?" how they came to be spoken at all? It was in this way. Hananiah, a bad man, prophesied things about the children of Judah which God had not told him to prophesy. And Jeremiah was told to go to the wicked prophet, and to say to him, "Hear now, Hananiah, the Lord hath not sent thee, but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord." So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month. He thought, perhaps, as he did not feel anything wrong with his bodily

health that God's word could not come true. But it did.

Sometimes God thus kills in anger as the punishment of sin. People become drunkards, and lose their life when they cannot take care of themselves, or Sabbath-breakers and thieves and murderers, and come to an untimely end because of their wrong doings. But we cannot always say that the greatest sinners die soonest. Many *good people* as well as *bad people* will die *this year*. However, it is good always to remember that it is *God who sends death* to the good and to the bad. When people ask what was the matter with this person or that, you hear their friends saying, oh, he caught a cold; or, she took the measles, or small-pox, or scarlet-fever,—and died. But you know that these things are all God's servants. It is He who says to health, "Go, and it goeth;" to distress, "Come, and it cometh;" and to death, "Do this, and it doeth it." Of every one whose body shall this year be carried to the grave, God is even now saying, "This year thou shalt die."

Do you think God is saying this of any of you? He is saying it of many as strong and

as young as you. If it were only *old* people that died, some of us might not be afraid of death for some years yet. But, I am sure, you have all seen *little coffins and little graves*. If it were told beforehand what people were to die *this year*, the rest would not be anxious. If you were told, for instance, This year all the Sabbath scholars belonging to a certain class in one church are to die, and next year, certain classes in another church are to die, you, who are not in these classes, might not be anxious about death for a year or two. But I'm sure you who were in next year's number would not be very happy, thinking that next year you were sure to die, though you were sure to live till the end of this one. It's better, then, that God does not say to us, "This year you shall die," or "Next year you shall die." But that he says, "It is appointed unto all to die." And as it may be any hour or day, or night or year, be ready—"Prepare to meet your God."

I have heard a story told of a person that appeared one day in the streets of a city, as if he had dropped down from the clouds. He could not speak the language of the people.

He had come from another world altogether, and the story is that he had been looking from his own world at ours. Seeing it so bright (just like a star it was) from his star world, he wished to live there rather than in his own world, and God gave him his request, but told him he must do as the people did, and submit to the same laws as they obeyed. The people, seeing he was a stranger, were very kind to him, and took him into their houses, and gave him every kind of good things they could think about. But a day or two after he came, he saw a funeral going along to the church-yard. "What," said he, "what is that?" "Oh," they said to him, "it is a funeral; never mind it; come away." "A funeral!" he asked; "and what is that?" "Oh," they said, "when people die they put their bodies in the grave. They are taking that man's body there just now. But never mind that; come away. It is a disagreeable sight and subject." "Oh, poor people!" he said; "are there many of them that have to be laid there?" "All must die," was the reply. "What! must you die?" said the stranger, perfectly surprised. "I have to do

as the people have to do. I, too, must die ! Oh, tell me how I am to know what to do to be prepared for dying !” And he was told of the Bible ; and by it, as it is said, he prepared to meet his God. I should like you, too, to be prepared, for this year some of *you* shall die. And each of you should say, “ Lord, is it I ? Oh, make me ready to depart ! ”

Every now and then we hear of young people dying, and that is a warning *especially to you*. You are *so apt* to think that your fathers and mothers should die *before you* ! Some of you have heard of the poor child that was run over the other day very near where we live by the cab and killed. That was very sudden, and you may die as suddenly. Some of you have heard me telling of the little *girl* — I daresay her brother, one of our Sabbath scholars, is here to-night — who died a few ~~weeks~~ ago, was only ill a day or two, and her mother looked one morning and found her dead in her bed, though she had been speaking to her a few minutes before. And what do you think she said ? “ I want my father ! take me to my father ! ” And Death did come to

take her away, not to the father she meant, but from her earthly mother to her heavenly Father and her everlasting home. Some of your young companions that expected to be very happy this New Year were dead before it came. Some Sabbath scholars told me of a little girl who, on the last Sabbath of the year, was saying to her class-fellows, "Oh, I shall be so happy this New Year. I shall have more toys than ever I have had. Won't it be fine?" Won't it be fine!—*she* was dead before the New Year morning came. And God only knows which of *you* may be next. But I don't want to frighten you with the fear of death. I want you rather to feel that your heavenly Father is sending him as a servant to call you to himself, just as a person might send for a pretty rosebud to put in a room of his own house, and not let it wither in the cold, bleak wind. I want you to think of God as beside you always. I want you to remember that old Father Time cannot take the scythe or cut with it without God's knowledge and command. I want you to be good children to your parents; good children of God, not telling lies or saying bad words, not quarrel-

ling or forgetting your prayers, not thinking what is wrong, wishing what is evil, doing what is mischievous ; not breaking the Sabbath or forgetting to read the Bible through the week. And then, believing thus in Christ, loving God and men, and having the Holy Spirit in your hearts, if this year you shall die, this year also you shall be with Christ in Paradise. God will not take you away from your friends and your present life in anger, but in love, to make you happier than you are here with your fathers and mothers and friends. But if you are bad boys and girls, what will become of you when you appear before Almighty God without your father to help you, or your mother to speak for you, if this year you are to die ? Oh, may God help us so to live as that when we die we shall go to heaven and dwell for ever with the Lord !

But II. *This is true of all, and must be true of you. In one sense we shall all die this year.*

Every one of *you* will die this year, even though at the end of it you should be alive and well. That sounds very strange ; but it

is true. Do you remember anybody who says, *I die daily*? Paul does. And if he died *every day*, may we not die *every year*? Yes. Do you remember another good man, the apostle Peter, speaking of our becoming dead unto sin and living unto righteousness? Well, I hope this year *you* will die unto sin.

You have seen grass, and weeds, and thorns, and thistles all cut down. They wither; they grow no longer; they gradually die. So with bad feelings and desires in the heart of a good child. By prayer, by thinking of God, by believing in Christ, by associating with good companions, a good child gets God's Holy Spirit, and that Spirit pulls up these thorns and the weeds of sin. And they do not grow. They die. The love of evil does not grow stronger. It becomes weaker and weaker, and the boy or girl thus becomes dead to all that is bad.

How do you know a dead person? He cannot hear, or move, or look, or speak. Well, the good boy and girl are *so dead* to sin that it cannot make them *look* or *listen* when they are told to do what is bad. They are deaf, and will not listen. When they are told to

come and see something wrong, they are blind, and will not look. They cannot move to such a haunt of evil. They cannot say what they know is displeasing to God. Now, how is it to be with you this year? *I hope* sincerely that *this year you will die in this way*. I hope you will starve the body of sin, and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. Perhaps you know there is a creeping worm that dies and becomes a beautiful butterfly afterwards. Well, I wish you to die in that way; not to be creeping earth-worms any more, but to fly up as on eagle's wings, soaring from the earth to heaven.

And if you do not thus die to sin and *become better* this year, you will die to holiness and *become worse*. You know by nature we are dead in trespasses and sins, and, like a dead body allowed to remain, we are becoming more corrupted. This year you will be worse if you do not pray and strive to be better. You will be dead in sin at the end of the year, if you do not die to sin as it is going on. And is not this a terrible thing? To have your soul as loathsome as a dead body, is, to be envious, uncharitable, unkind,

dishonest, untruthful, unprayerful, un-church-going ! To be a bad boy or girl like this is to be far worse than if you were dead. And though it would be sad to be carried home to your parents dead some day this year, yet many a parent at the end of it, thinking of their living children and their dead ones, will think, " We are sorry about the dear dead one, but we are far more sorry about the living one. We wish he had died in childhood. Better dead and in the grave than having a name to live and being dead in trespasses and sins." You are at the Sabbath school to flee from this spiritual death, so that you may not have all good thoughts and wishes dead within you at the end of the year.

What an awful thing if next New Year you carried about with you a dead soul ! Everywhere God's goodness was to be seen, but your soul was blind ! God's voice might be heard, but your soul was deaf ! God's people praised him, but your soul was speechless ! Christ's brethren carried the cross and went forward to the crown, but your soul would not move to holiness or heaven ! You would not wish to be so bad, *so dead as that.*

Wherefore, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Work out thy salvation with fear and trembling, or else this year thou shalt die.

It is a terrible thing for the body to die. It is a far more terrible thing for the soul to die, so that it cannot enjoy God, so that it cannot enjoy happiness. Now, you and I must have died for ever, our bodies must have suffered pain for ever, and our souls must have been without any happiness for ever, if Christ had not come to deliver us from death. I cannot better tell you how Christ has done this than by repeating to you what the Indian convert said. He took the European, who asked, scoffing, what Christ had done for him, to the door. He took a worm, put it in a ring of dry leaves and straw, set fire to the ring, snatched like a brand from the burning *the worm*, and gave it as Christ *gave him, a worm, a place near his heart*. Oh, now; can you crucify him afresh? How can you destroy your own souls when he has done so much to save you?

He has sent, he is sending still, a good Spirit to strive with you and save you from

that evil spirit who is seeking to destroy you and everything in you that is good. Now, which of these spirits would you wish to die? Surely not the good. It is as if God had put two trees in your heart,—a good tree and a bad. Naturally, it is the bad tree that flourishes. But if you be a good boy or girl, this year that tree will become withered, and will not bring forth bad fruit. The fruits it brings forth are strife, vanity, pride, envy, falsehood, impiety, all kinds of evil. Surely you will pray, and watch, and strive that this bad tree within you may die. But God has planted a tree of life within you. He waters it by the dews of his grace, and if you ask you will receive the Holy Spirit, so that it will bring forth fruits of holiness. Will you let that tree of life die and rot this year? Surely no. Let the Sabbath school be made the means of urging you to grow in grace and be partakers of eternal life. Bloom like flowers of Eden—fadeless flowers,—not dying this year, *nor for ever*. And now, parents, if you are sad because your children have died in childhood, try so to live as to be with them in heaven. Have you heard the beautiful

story of a little boy sailing in a boat on a large lake, and coming to an island and left there. By-and-by mists came down on it. The father everywhere sought his child, and could not see him. But he heard a voice saying, "Steer this way, father;" and so he steered and reached the island, where he found his son. Even so, as we sail on the sea of life we lose sight, for a season, of our children and dearest friends amid the mists of death. But while clouds and darkness hide them from our view we hear, wafted from the shore they have already reached, a voice which bids us steer our course thither. And God grant that we may do so, and dwell for ever with those who are "not lost, but gone before," to these delightful islands of the blest.

And teachers, and those of you that should and might be teachers, be up and doing. "What your hand findeth to do, do it with your might." Do not say, "*Next year* we shall teach." "By-and-by we shall prepare more earnestly for our Sabbath work." This year ye may die. Not a year, oh, not a week delay! for "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation;" "Exhort one another

daily while it is called to-day." We do not know the time—this night we may die. Need I remind you of that midnight disaster which has so lately filled the whole city with sorrow and the whole country with sympathy? I mean the fall of a whole land of houses in the High Street, and the death, in consequence, of thirty-five of its inhabitants. Several of our Sabbath scholars were there, and two perished in the ruins. As I think of them, how I hope *they* did not forget that night to kneel before God, and say,—

"This night I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
Take me to heaven for Jesus' sake!"

They fell asleep to waken in eternity. Oh, what a sermon to us all! Let others live in sin and to themselves. Be it ours to say, "Let others do as they will, but as for us, whether we live this year, we shall live to the Lord, whether we die, we shall die to the Lord; and thus, living or dying, we shall be his." Amen.

XII.

Early Piety.

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”—ECCLES. xii. 1.



THE subject of this sermon to you is *early piety*. I shall explain to you immediately what is meant by these two words. But, in the meantime try to remember them; so that if any one should ask you what you have been reading about you will be able to tell them it was early piety. The word piety occurs only once in the Bible, in this verse from 1 Timothy, “If any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to show *piety* at home, and to requite their parents, for that is good and acceptable before God.” Here then piety evidently means the love, and reverence, and obedience of a child to a parent. To exercise piety to God then is to look up to

Him as your Father, and to cherish towards Him such feelings as good children have to their earthly parents. You are to love God as you love your mother ; to believe God as you believe your father ; to do what God bids you ; to be thankful for what God gives you ; to listen to what God tells you, and not to wish for or to do anything that He forbids.

But, perhaps, you may say, we cannot love God as we love our father, for we cannot see God, and do not know what He is like. Is it then impossible for blind Sabbath scholars *to love* their fathers and mothers because they *cannot see* them? Surely not. Neither is it impossible for you to love God though you cannot see Him. And as to not knowing God's character, surely you have not your Bibles, and your Sabbaths, and your teachers, and your friends, without knowing that God is good, and just, and loving, and true, and holy, and perfect. When, therefore, I tell you that to be pious you must love God, I mean that you must love these things that He loves ; and try to be truthful, and just, and loving, and good, and holy, and perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect. Some people,

even grown-up people, when they speak of piety, think it means only, or, chiefly, saying prayers, reading the Bible, and going to church. But you see it means a good deal more than that. It means loving good, loving God in our hearts every day, and in every place; loving good in our work and worship in the church and school, in the house, and on the street; doing what our Father is pleased with, and not doing anything which makes our Father angry. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things."

Perhaps you think it is a very difficult thing to have piety. And so it is. Many a scholar who is very clever, and can say his psalms and questions, has not piety, and does not love his Father in heaven, and his brothers and sisters, and friends on earth. Many a man or woman, who goes to church, and joins the sacrament, and blames others for not doing so, has no piety, and does not love the Lord with all his heart, and mind, and soul, and

strength, and his neighbour as himself. How, then, you ask, are we to get this piety? How can we learn to love, and trust, and obey God as our Father in heaven? I can tell you that Jesus Christ came down to this world to make you pious, and if you believe him, and follow him, you will have this piety which I wish you all to have; but not otherwise.

You go to your Sabbath class to learn about Jesus. Believe what you learn; do what you know, and God will love you, and you will love God. Believe that your heavenly Father sent Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners, as the Lamb of God a sacrifice for sin, though the salvation needed the shedding of his own blood, and that *now* God receives them again into his favour, and gives them his grace, and you will surely love your Father for his goodness, and Christ Jesus as your divine and greatest friend. Believe that God, for Christ's sake, is willing to make you good and happy on earth and in heaven, and you will surely love him. Believe that Jesus is our great Teacher sent from God, and you will surely do what he tells you. Believe that Jesus is the very image of the invisible

God, and if you love God, and wish to be like Him, you will love Jesus, and follow in his steps. Believe when Jesus tells you that God gives His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, that they may be able and willing to lead a godly life ; and surely you will ask that you may receive, and seek that you may find, and knock that it may be opened unto you. Believe Jesus when he tells you God always sees you, always loves you, always hates sin, and will judge the world in righteousness at the last day ; and surely you will live as in the sight and service of God ; and thus, if you lead a life of faith in Christ, you will be saved from many sins and sufferings here, and from every sin and suffering hereafter.

Surely you will not say *now* that piety is impossible. Jesus has come from God. He lived, and died, and rose again to give it you. The word of God has been written to give it you. The Spirit of God is offered to give it you. Ministers preach, teachers instruct, friends pray and strive to give it you. God sends health and sickness, blessings and New Years, that you may be led to love him, and to receive from him more and more from year

to year the Spirit and likeness of Jesus Christ His Son who, from his lowly birth to his cruel death, was perfect in piety. But I must not forget that my subject is not merely piety, but early piety. Now I know it is a very common feeling, on the part of boys and girls, that it is all very well for grown-up men and women to be serious and religious, to love God and love their neighbours, to be good and to do good; in a word, to be pious men and women, but *they* are too young for that. While they are children let them think, and speak, and act as they like. By-and-by they will put away these childish things, and settle down into good men and women. It is therefore my great object to-night to persuade you to begin to be religious *now*, to induce each of you to say, in answer to the question asked in the Bible by God himself, "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth," Yea, Lord, I desire now to be thy loving and obedient child, to dedicate myself this year, this night to thee, to seek thee early that I may find thee, to remember now my Creator in the days of my youth. I desire not only some

years after this to be a pious man or woman, but to have early piety.

It is my earnest wish that this may be your resolution, and to strengthen it. I shall advance some reasons to persuade you *now*, without a year's, a day's, an hour's delay, to dedicate yourselves to God.

I. And first, this is the *design of heaven*. It is the wish of the blessed Godhead. There are, as you know, three persons in the Godhead,—the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Now it is the *purpose of the Father*, it is the *work of the Son*, it is the *object of the Holy Ghost* to make you pious *now*, so that as you grow in years you may grow in faith, and love, and holiness of life. It is the wish of the blessed Godhead, not only that there should be piety, but early piety among the children of men.

1. This is the *will and purpose* of the Father.


He made us in his own image, and after his own likeness; and he wishes us always, and from the very first, to bear his image, and to be like him. We might conceive it

to be otherwise, if we supposed God's character different. We can imagine some god (but not our God) saying to us, "My object is to give you enjoyment, and if you like you may seek for it in sinful pleasures while you are young and strong; but, before you die, you must dedicate yourselves to *me*." This, many persons seem to believe, is the purpose of our God regarding us. They look on piety as something which is chiefly, if not only, needed for heaven. After the first age of Christianity men began to act on this belief. Hence baptism was delayed till the converts lay on their death-bed. Holiness they thought was needed for heaven, not for earth; and as baptism, they fancied, washed all sins away, they had themselves baptized when they were dying that they might enter pure and spotless into heaven. We know that baptism is not regeneration; and that the unbaptized one, like the thief on the cross, may enter heaven, and the baptized one may be driven away from it. We also know that piety is meant for this world as well as the next, and that it is as much *our* duty on the earth to serve and love the Lord as it is the part of saints and angels to

glorify God in heaven. Piety is not for a future world alone. It is for our whole life in time and in eternity. Therefore, to obey the will of God we must begin at once. We must obey Him now. Christ was His beloved Son; and even as the babe of Bethlehem, and the child of Nazareth, his piety was perfect. We must be like him if we would be the well-beloved children of God. We must be perfect as our Father who is in heaven is perfect; and *now* is the accepted time. "Remember *now* thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Love thy heavenly Father as soon as thou beginnest to love thine earthly father, or thy Sabbath school teacher. Wilt thou not now and henceforth cry, wherever thou art, "O God, my Father, thou art the guide of my youth!"

2. This is the *work of the Son*. His name is called Jesus *because* he saves his people *from* their sins. He does not mean people to live a wicked life, and then to come to him upon their death-bed to be saved from hell. Faith in Christ is meant to give us piety; and piety is needed for life as well as death; time as well as eternity; earth as well as heaven.

Nor does Jesus mean people to grow up careless and wicked ; and then, after they have wandered far away, like the prodigal, and made themselves wretched by their folly, arise and come to him that he may take them to their Father again. It is not Jesus' work to save men after years of sin, but *from* their sins. He prevents them from forming evil habits. He enables the lambs of his flock at the very first to hear and know his voice ; to love and follow him. I do not say that he refuses the vicious, and outcast, and prodigal, if they repent and return. Them that come to him he will in nowise cast out. But it is Jesus' great work to make the very children of men, children of God ; to sanctify their whole life to God ; to prevent them from entering the fields of sin ; and dimming their eyes, and paralyzing their spiritual frame-work, and spending their strength and substance, and best earthly years in Satan's service. Jesus suffers little children to come to him ; yea, invites, entreats them to draw near that they may be saved from their sins now, and be at once the subjects of the kingdom of God. Will ye not then from this time cry



unto God, "My Father, thou art the guide of our youth."

3. This is the *object* of the *Holy Ghost*—to make you year by year grow in grace, and in the knowledge and love of the truth. When a property is left to any one, he does not get it into his own power till he grows up, but the gift of the Holy Spirit is not thus kept from the young; just as children are baptized with water, so are children often baptized with the Holy Ghost: and the teaching and training of the home and the school are all so many means which the Spirit of God employs to fill us with divine truth and love—just as God gives the season of youth for learning earthly languages and trades, and for getting on with our education, so He gives the season of youth for learning the language of heaven. No doubt many whose education has been neglected in early life afterwards make up for it; so many whose youth has been spent in folly afterwards learn that wisdom which begins in the fear of God. Therefore we rejoice to hear of revivals among grown-up people, knowing that the Spirit of God can arrest the careless, work among the

hardened, convert the man who has for years been living in unbelief and sin, and sanctify the habitually vile. But still, as youth is the time for education, and as they who pass through youth without it, do not generally get it afterwards, so is youth the time for entering on our spiritual life, and becoming partakers of piety, and though afterwards men, irreligious and immoral in their youth, may by fits and starts very often fill their spirits with remorse, the Holy Spirit is not so often seen entering and abiding there. It is the object of the Holy Ghost to sanctify us from the very cradle. Do not resist Him, lest He go away, and you be left with your own corrupted spirit—with the evil spirit all through life. “Now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.” “Will you not from this time cry unto God, My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth?” We shall certainly do so, if we really mean what we say in praying, “Thy will be done;” for assuredly this is the will of the Father, the work of His Son, and the great object of His Holy Spirit—even our sanctification, without a year’s neglect or delay. From your child-

hood you may know your heavenly Father ; why should you not love Him now even as you love your earthly friends ? This is *early piety*.

II. But, secondly, I press early piety upon you because it is the *only sure* piety. You say you mean to be pious men and women ; God does not ask what you mean to be, but what you are. A great many poor people say, " Oh, if I were rich I would give a great deal of money to the poor, and do a great deal of good with it." But that is not what God asks of them ; he says, You are poor ; bear your poverty in a Christian spirit ; do not envy the rich ; do not murmur or complain. So when you say, I mean to be good when I grow up, God says, I do not ask you that question ; I ask you, will you give me your heart *now* ; I bid you do your mother's bidding *now* ; tell the truth now ; read your Bible now ; believe Christ now ; pray for God's help and Spirit now ; keep from evil now. What would your father say to you if, when you were asked now to go a message, you said to him, Not to-day ; but if you tell

me to-morrow to do something, I will do it? So God is angry if you will not come to Christ and love him now. You speak of being good men and women; how do you know you will ever be men or women? Are there *no deaths among young people*? Half of the people that are born into the world die in their childhood. You have heard of young companions, brothers, and sisters, and friends dying, and may not you? And if you have not early piety, you will never have it if you die; for after death there is no cross to come to, and no pardon for sin. "Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might." Remember the foolish virgins; they thought they would get up by-and-by and trim their lamps, and get oil, and be ready, but they had not time. And you may not have time either; you may die suddenly as well as soon. How many do! In fire, in accident, in shipwreck, for instance, what opportunity is there for making up for the delay of years? Death may come on you as it came on the man who was busy dressing when he heard of a friend being very ill; he said, I have no time to be ill; just then he was drawing on his boot,

he gave a sigh, and was dead. Would you not in such a case prefer that death should find you praying, as it found a pious minister of my acquaintance not long ago ; he was found dead on his knees : or reading the Bible, as it found a poor old man and woman whom I remember reading of. A man came in to rob them, and murdered them for their money, with the Bible in their hands. Surely this is infinitely better than to die in a fit of drink, or rage, or blasphemy.

God calls for your obedience *now*. Will you refuse? if so, He may refuse to comfort you when you are dying, even though you may be long ill. Remember those awful words, " Because I have called, and ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof : I also will laugh at your calamity ; I will mock when your fear cometh ; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind ; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer ; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me : for that they hated knowledge, and

did not choose the fear of the Lord ; they would none of my counsel ; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them " (Prov. i. 24-32). This very night then arise and go unto your Father, and dedicate yourselves to him, crying unto him from this time, "Thou art the guide of my youth."

But though it is true that death takes no holidays, does not sleep during the night, and does not rest on the Sabbath-day, but is ever busy, and will not wait till you are ready, I do not wish to press early piety upon you merely or chiefly because you may die early. I hope, and shall suppose you will live many years, yet you must die, and you must, while you live, get the Pearl of great price, the treasure of piety, or you will never have holiness and never have happiness at all. Now, surely, if a thing must be done, it is far safer to do it at once. You know *what a strange thing habit is*. If I am accustomed to get up at a certain hour, I naturally waken then. If I

put off the doing of a thing from time to time, I am all the likelier to put it off again. So is it with good habits and bad ones. If you go on careless and prayerless, unbelieving and unloving, you will be likely to continue so all your life, and if you *now* say, "Go Thy way," to your heavenly Father, you are likely to say so in man and womanhood as well. If you begin to make dress or pleasure your idol; if you begin to go with bad companions, you will find it every day harder to give them up; for not only will your habits be formed, but Satan will, as it were, bind you to himself. He will get more power over you every year you live in sin, and make it all but impossible for you to return to God. He will blind your eyes, so that you will not see the change upon your soul, and you will gradually be reconciled to a sinful life, and think lightly of evil, and not be able to repent of it; and thus because you cannot repent, you will not be forgiven. You have seen old people deaf, blind, paralyzed, with failing memory and blunted feelings; it is so with the old in spiritual things. They cannot hear God, or see sin, or go to the paths of holiness. Satan has weakened and deadened

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them ; and because they would not have early piety, they cannot now have piety at all. No doubt they shrink from death, and are afraid of hell ; but the judge does not let every criminal off who is afraid of punishment. And God is a just judge, and will not forgive us merely because when death is coming to take us to the judgment seat, we are filled with terror, and weep at the prospect of eternal death. Now, then, Sabbath scholars, “Remember *now* your Creator in the days of your youth.”

III. But thirdly, I press early piety upon you because it is the best piety for yourselves and others. First, *for yourselves*. It will save you from many sins and from many sufferings ; the want of it will add to your guilt, and make you do evil, which you can never undo. What misery and remorse it gives us to look back upon years spent in Satan’s service ; and though God forgives us, we cannot forgive ourselves ; it is so much time lost,—nay, it is so much *power* lost. We cannot resist evil so easily as if we had never formed habits of sin. Second, *it is better for others*. We can

do good even in our youth ; many boys and girls have added to others' happiness, and saved others' souls ; on the other hand, bad boys and girls pierce their friends' and parents' hearts with sorrows, and though they may afterwards repent, it may be too late to give comfort to those they have so deeply grieved ; and though a bad man repents, his repentance does not insure the pardon and reformation of those whom he has led astray. The stone rolling from the mountain height sets other stones in motion, and though it may itself be stopped, *they* still go on destroying and destroyed. Adam and Eve, perhaps, repented, and are now in heaven, but the evils of their rebellion have gone on for many thousands of years, and reached to millions of men ; and if on the judgment day you see persons you have helped to ruin on the left hand, while you are on the right ; if in heaven far across the gulf curses rise because you dragged them down to sin and misery, will you not wish even in eternity that you had "remembered your Creator in the days of your youth?" Besides it is possible to go *maimed* to heaven. All will be happy there, but all will not possess the

same capacity of happiness. Every vessel will be full, but not of the same size. The brands that have been plucked from the burning will be saved from the fires of wrath ; but the fact that they have been so long amid the fires of sin may tell upon their position and dignity even in the mansions of God's house. It is better late than never ; but best, never late. We have all a far way to travel to piety and perfectness ; we have not a moment to lose in beginning our journey ; even in threescore years and ten the end of it will not be reached. And now, surely, I have said enough to convince you that you ought to dedicate your youth to God.

Let me however, add, that many boys and girls *have so led a pious life*. Samuel as a boy loved the Lord, and served him ; so did King Josiah ; so did John the Baptist ; so have many more in every age. Be ye followers of them ; be ye followers of Jesus. He was a holy child, as well as a perfect man ; he was only twelve years old when his parents sought for him in the temple in Jerusalem, and found him engaged about his Father's business. So may you be devout in childhood ; he was

subject to his parents, and did the ordinary duties of life in his youth as well as in his manhood ; so may you. Honour your parents ; set a watch on your tempers and your lips ; “ if sinners entice you, consent you not.” Remember who it is who makes this request, “ Wilt thou not from this time say, Be thou my guide ? ” It is a King. If the queen were to ask you to do something, you would not willingly refuse her. Will you refuse God this ? It is your best friend who asks you. If a dear friend in America or Australia were to write you, asking you to do something, you would not surely put the letter away, and think of the request no more. This Bible is God’s letter to you,—oh, do not slight it ! This text is God’s request,—oh, do not refuse it ! It is your Father’s wish that you should believe the Bible, and obey it. It is your Saviour’s wish to draw you now from sin. Oh, do not thwart him who died for your pardon, and lives for your holiness and happiness ! It is the Holy Ghost’s object to put His own breath into your spiritual frame, that you may lead a holy life. Do not prefer the devil’s spirit and a wicked life ; do not grieve God’s

Spirit lest he leave you to yourselves for evermore ; and do not delay ; remember that death is busy ; remember that habits once formed are not easily given up ; remember that Satan once admitted to your heart is not easily driven out. Even now you are dead in trespasses and sins ; you have rebelled already against God, and the wages of sin is death. But you are young yet ; you are like Jairus' daughter, who was twelve years old, whom Jesus looked on as sleeping, rather than hopelessly dead, whom he easily awakened. But if you delay, corruption will increase till you are loathsome, to look upon, worse than Lazarus, who, even after he was raised, had his grave-clothes bound around him, and bore the marks of his sepulchral dwelling-place. There is as much difference between the child dead in sins, and the hardened sinner utterly depraved, as between Jairus' daughter and a body which for weeks had lain in the grave. And yet there is hope for every one who hears me. Jesus wakened her ; he raised a young man, the widow of Nain's son ; he raised a man of middle age, who had been dead for some days ; and though no old person was ever raised from the dead

by him, yet after his resurrection many bodies of saints that had *long* been sleeping were raised up. Nothing is beyond the power of Jesus. But we have no promise to rely upon unless we come to him *at once*. To young and old then, in conclusion, let me say, whatever you have been in time past, be God's *now*. The time past of your life is more than sufficient to have wrought the will of the flesh. *Now* pray for pardon for Christ's sake ; trust for salvation to him, and follow him ; you cannot have a safer Guide through life and death, and if you follow him now, you will dwell with him in the house of the Lord for ever. Amen.



